

Joshua Humble

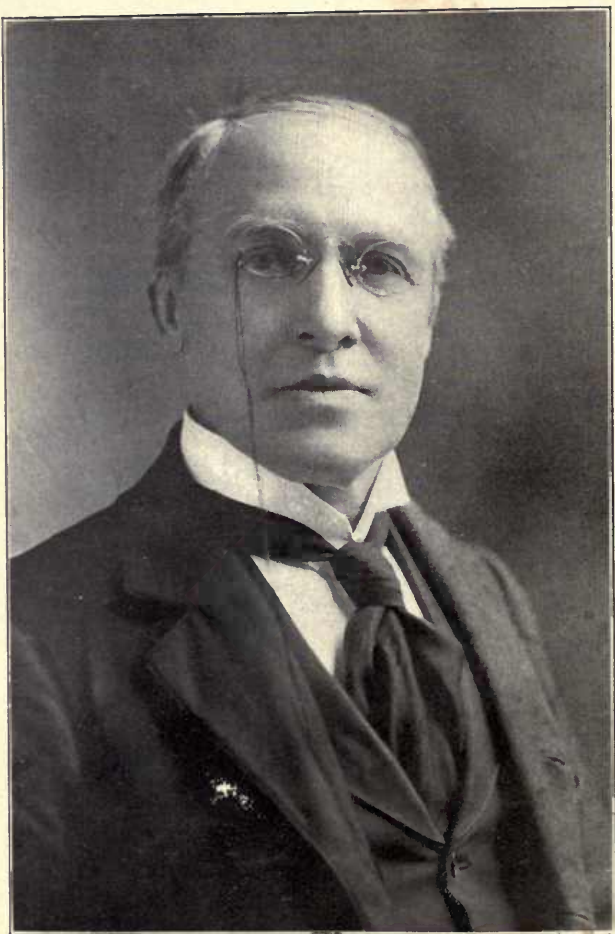
A tale of Old St. Louis



Edgar Rice Beach

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Joshua Humble

A Tale of Old St. Louis

By

Edgar Rice Beach

St. Louis

*Edward R. Eddins & Co.
Publishers*

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Edgar R. Beach,
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"Everything Comes To Him Who Waits."

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JOSHUA HUMBLE

A Tale of Old St. Louis

CHAPTER I.

MR. HUMBLE'S EARLY MORNING EXPERIENCE.

On one of the principal business streets of St. Louis, many years ago, a handsome office building was erected. Its walls were of polished blue limestone from a quarry in the western suburbs, and its sills, lintels and steps were of brown granite. The roof, which was of the French style of architecture, was sheathed with slate of different colors and curved gracefully upward to a level surface, in the center of which was a small square dome ornamented on its upper edges by iron lattice work with gilded dart-shaped points, and on its apex by a golden weather vane.

The building was three stories in height, the entire ground floor being occupied by its owner, Joshua Humble, General Financial Agent, and Dealer in Stocks and Bonds, while the upper stories

were divided into offices and tenanted by professional men.

The office of Joshua Humble was a marvel of elegance: woodwork and furniture of polished cedar; floors of marble tiling; bronze chandeliers with cut glass prisms which reflected the light in many brilliant colors; windows of plate glass protected by gilded bars of steel, and finally a large vault with massive iron door and time-lock for the safe keeping of valuables.

The home of Joshua Humble was on Garrison Avenue in the western portion of the town. It was a grand structure—vast in dimensions for a residence at that time—a marvel indeed of elegance and comfort.

Although the relentless wrecker—Time, has wrought many changes, both the office building and residence of Joshua Humble still stand, the former, old and weather-stained, its beautiful roof of slate having been replaced by a flat platform of rough wood covered with coal-tar and gravel, and its plate glass windows broken and patched. The former office of Mr. Humble is now occupied by a dealer in old clothing, and the upper rooms of the building are tenanted by makers of advertising signs. The residence, having been recently renovated and repaired, is apparently unchanged; but many superstitious people gravely affirm that strange gruesome forms flit to and fro under the deep shadows of the trees

on the lawn, when rain falls upon the earth and lightning flashes across the sky.

* * * * *

An overgrown town, time-worn and weather-beaten, had, within the space of a quarter of a century, been transformed into a great commercial metropolis teeming with human life and throbbing with industrial energy. The process of evolution from town to city had wrought many wonderful changes: the distant suburb had become the center of population, and the former center of population had become the business center, and in that space of time little children had become men and women, bearing lightly and bravely the cares and responsibilities of their parents, and bringing into action the vigor of manhood and womanhood for the solution of the problems of a new era. But these were not all of the changes that had been wrought in the process of evolution. In numerous instances the employer and employe had changed places, the former wage-earner having become the employer of his former master. And there had also been many financial wrecks during that transformation. Millionaires had been brought to feel the pinchings of poverty and even the pangs of hunger, and among that class of unfortunates, Joshua Humble was, beyond question the most conspicuous. His fall was from a lofty height of honor, wealth and power, to the low level of an impecunious wage-earner, a fall from

which he could never hope to recover, and he sank into obscurity as a great ship sinks into the soundless depths of the sea, and was soon forgotten.

Plain Mr. Humble in shabby attire, modest and silent, a mere living human reminiscence, was in public estimation, quite different in all respects from Joshua Humble the wealthy financier before his fall from high social and business eminence, leaving nothing in the vacuum but his wealth in other hands; and so, as the years went by, he sank lower in poverty, and deeper in social obscurity and no friendly hand was extended to lift him to a higher plane.

When Sol Miserleigh, who succeeded Mr. Humble in business — by virtue of an assignment in satisfaction of an alleged indebtedness far beyond Mr. Humble's ability to pay — assumed the proprietorship thus transferred to him, it was Miserleigh's good fortune to be enabled by the terms of the settlement, to retain Mr. Humble in the business and to thus practically own him. Mr. Humble's entire fortune did not liquidate his alleged indebtedness, and so as Sol Miserleigh, who was his sole creditor, proposed to allow Mr. Humble to pay the balance due in monthly installments, a settlement upon that basis was concluded, and Joshua Humble calmly entered upon his duties as a wage-earner and failed not to return to his employer the stipulated portion of his monthly earnings. And so as the years glided along

and became to him only ghastly phantoms of memory, the period of Joshua Humble's servitude was correspondingly shortened and the joyous future seemed to leap backward to meet him. At last the day, almost the hour, of his deliverance was at hand, but his spirit had become so broken by long subservience to the will of a stern taxmaster, and his mind so deadened by poverty and humiliation that he did not seem to realize the approaching fulfillment of his dream of liberty, which began at the moment of his downfall and from which he had not yet fully awakened.

It was early morning — the last day of the week. A dense fog hung over St. Louis, obscuring all objects at a distance and rendering even those nearby dim and indistinct. The atmosphere was chilling and oppressive, the trees were dripping with moisture and the pavements and street crossings were as wet as though a heavy rain had just fallen.

Joshua Humble emerged from the doorway of his little home in a quarter of the city tenanted by laboring people, glanced up at the dark sky through which the first rays of early dawn gleamed feebly, drew his thin worn coat closely about his stalwart form, and then with reluctant, hesitating footsteps, hurried down to the pavement and walked rapidly toward the business center of the city. No restful slumber had come to him during the night. He had lain in a semi-conscious condition as motionless as

a corpse, his mind active and alert, thinking of the past, of vanished wealth and comfort, of his once prosperous business and beautiful home, of the long dreary years of humiliation and toil since then, of his voluntary self-sacrifice for the sake of one dearer to him than life — all this, and more; he dreamed of his emancipation, of his restoration to wealth and affluence, of the downfall of his oppressor; but just then a soft little hand passed over his face, and a baby voice said gently, "Why Grandpa dear, your face is wet; you are crying! Dear good Grandpa don't cry — Allie loves you, don't you know?"

"Yes, darling," said Mr. Humble, taking the little one in his arms. "Yes, darling, I know you love Grandpa."

The child had been awakened by the sound of his sobbing, as she had been awakened many times before, and creeping from her little couch by his bedside had gone to comfort him.

A sudden gleam of dawn came in through the window. It was a mere flash like the dim reflection of a distant electric light. It wavered and flickered through the swaying branches of the trees. It glowed and increased in brightness until Mr. Humble became conscious of the fact that day was breaking. He arose, went to the window and looked out across the housetops. He saw the daylight faintly gleaming through the dense veil of fog and knew

that he could not wait for breakfast and fulfill the requirements of his taskmaster.

As he hurried along the street, under dripping awnings and trees he gradually increased his pace to his utmost speed for the long distance he would have to go, when suddenly a shrill cracked voice called out to him from an upper window of a dilapidated building:

"Ahem! I say, Mr. Humble!"

For a moment he was startled and disconcerted by the sudden summons to parley, but glancing swiftly upward he beheld a fat puffy female face at the window, and bowing graciously, responded in a pleasant voice:

"Ah; good morning Mrs. Sly; good morning madam! I regret to say that I am very late this morning. My clock stopped during the night, and the fog misled me as to the time. I could not even wait for a cup of coffee, so I cannot stop now to talk as usual." He made a movement to pass on, when Mrs. Sly from her perch at the window again called out to him, and, quite impatiently.

"But, I say Mr. Humble, did you hear the news—the dreadful news?"

"No," he replied stopping short and gazing up at the repulsive face in the window. "No. What startling news have you to communicate now?"

"You will be surprised and horrified I know," responded the gossip with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Why, if you will believe me, I was knocked dumb and silly for half an hour when I first heard of it. 'Tis awful! awful! dumped out of the world in a jiffy! Ah he was such a sinner! and no wife or child to get his pile of dough."

"Hush! hush Mrs. Sly," interposed Mr. Humble, gently, "I cannot stand here to listen to such chatter. Who on earth are you talking about?"

"I am not talking about anybody on earth," she answered petulantly. "I am speaking of one who has just gone from earth—only the Lord knows where! Ah, he was a sinner—an awful sinner, Mr. Humble!"

"Will you kindly tell me to whom you refer?" he asked quite impatiently.

"Yes," responded Mrs. Sly drawlingly, "you are always in such a pinch, you can never wait for me to tell a yarn as it should be told. William Barnes is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Mr. Humble tremblingly, "Dead!" repeated Mrs. Sly tragically, leering downward at the white upturned face of her listener. "Died an hour ago, got out of his bed to take a bath and fell dead in his room. Died of heart disease. Doctor just gone away and the old housekeeper and servants howling around the house. I heard the racket and skipped over there and"—

Joshua Humble heard no more, for he was far beyond the sound of her shrill quacking voice,

ejaculating as he hurried along, "Dead! Dead! William Barnes dead."

Finally he turned into a narrow business street, hastened along half a square, paused in front of a doorway over which was suspended a large sign on which were the words in raised bronze letters: "Sol Miserleigh, Dealer in Stocks and Bonds." As he paused, Mr. Humble glanced hastily up and down the street and an expression of relief came upon his face.

"Not here in advance of me as I feared he would be," he said in a low tone, "I am indeed fortunate. Probably he overslept as I did, owing to the lateness of daybreak, on account of the fog." He paused a moment and glanced up at the building before which he stood. "Growing old," he continued sadly, "Just as I am, ageing and badly in need of repair. The roof is about ready to collapse from decay and the cornice lops down on the northwest corner and threatens to fall upon the street. Ah me! how beautiful this building was when it was mine. I can hardly realize that I was once its owner, it was so long—so very long ago, it seems to me as a dream! He stood still a few moments looking down upon the pavement with an expression of ineffable sadness upon his face. Suddenly the sound of approaching footsteps came echoing around the corner of the street, and with a quick movement Mr. Humble drew from his pocket a large key with

which he opened the door, and as it swung backward upon its hinges he entered the office at the same moment that Sol Miserleigh turned the corner of the street half a square distant, and with raised hand pointed toward him menacingly with its quivering forefinger. A few moments later, Miserleigh entered the room, paused in front of Mr. Humble, glared angrily into his face silently while one might count ten, and then in an insolent questioning tone he said, "Well?"

"Well," responded Mr. Humble in a low voice.

"I say, Well!" snarled Miserleigh, threateningly.

"And I say, Very well!" replied Mr. Humble, defiantly, as a scarlet flush swept over his face.

"Don't you understand me?" demanded Miserleigh quivering with rage.

"You estimate my intelligence by a very low standard if you presume that I do not understand your meaning perfectly. Even the meanest cur can feel a kick, and can understand the motive of his inhuman master in administering the punishment," replied Mr. Humble in a firm voice as he leaned upon the broom which he held in his hands, and with which he had begun to sweep the floor when Miserleigh entered the office.

"Well," continued Miserleigh, choking with anger, "I want to know why you are late again?"

"My clock stopped in the night and of course

the alarm did not act; you observe the fog and how dark it yet is, I—”

“Enough of that,” interrupted Miserleigh. “That won’t do for an excuse; clean up the office immediately and charge yourself with a quarter of a day lost time. I’ve been fining you for tardiness and shiftlessness for years and I should presume that you might have learned by this time that I am not to be trifled with. Now hurry and clean up the office while I go for my breakfast. I’ll be gone just fifteen minutes and if you fail to have everything in its proper place when I return, I’ll fine you another quarter of a day.”

Joshua Humble smiled disdainfully and looked steadily and without so much as a quivering of his eyelashes, into the wavering sullen eyes of Sol Miserleigh. A moment they stood facing each other in silence, each striving mentally for the mastery, each endeavoring to overawe the other with silent scorn. It was their first contest, and the bold and defiant demeanor of Mr. Humble surprised and angered Sol Miserleigh beyond expression. The former had been the quiet, spiritless, obedient servant of the latter nearly twenty-five years — a lion subservient to a coyote. The master keenly realized the overwhelming superiority of his servant and hated him therefor with the degree of intensity of which only the moral degenerate is capable, and the latter, remembering only his obligation and his duty as the

protector of one who had become the victim of this human monster, wavered not, complained not, but with stoical indifference bore the humiliation and the cruelty of actual slavery, and silently scorned his cruel master. And so, as these two men stood facing each other defiantly, there was an actual conflict of opposing mental forces and Sol Miserleigh, being the weaker, was vanquished.

"You are having your day now," said Mr. Humble, finally, with a quiet smile, "but it will soon be over." Then he began sweeping the floor, and without reply Sol Miserleigh turned away and passed quietly out upon the street.

Ten minutes later Mr. Humble had completed his task of cleaning the office, had brought from the hydrant a bucket of fresh water, climbed upon his stool at the tall desk, dipped his pen in the ink and poised it over the page of an account book, when Sol Miserleigh entered the office, walked to his desk sat down before it and began picking his teeth in sullen silence.

CHAPTER II.

A HUMAN CYCLONE.

Mr. Humble hesitated a moment with his pen poised in position to write, but finally straightened himself upright on his stool, carefully placed the pen above his ear, turned his face toward Sol Miserleigh and said:

"Have you heard the dreadful news Mr. Miserleigh?"

"News? No. Dreadful news? What do you mean?" demanded Miserleigh in a quivering voice, half rising from his seat in alarm.

"William Barnes is dead."

"What — dead? William Barnes dead? It is a lie! Who told you so?"

He had risen from his chair and advanced half way between his desk and the place where Mr. Humble sat perched upon his stool. His face was white and his hands quivered convulsively.

"When? Where? How did he die?" he demanded with a gasp, almost beseechingly.

"William Barnes died of heart disease at his home at half past five o'clock this morning," replied Mr. Humble calmly.

"William Barnes dead? It is dreadful news, Humble," responded Miserleigh.

"Yes," continued Mr. Humble sadly, "It was so sudden, so entirely unexpected, and he was so strong and full of life — so vigorous and so joyous always, and in the very fullness of his prime."

"Bah!" interrupted Miserleigh, with a sneer. "I have no patience with such sentimental drivel. He was only a man and all men must die sometime. He was no friend of mine and I don't care the value of a button about his taking off. Sudden, eh? That's the best way to go. Fudge! I've something more agreeable and important to think about just at present than a dead man — friend or enemy. Friend? pah! there's no such thing as real friendship among men! Every man is a natural enemy of every other man on earth, and all know it and act accordingly. That is perfectly natural, and what is natural is right. Life is a battle from birth to death and only the fittest survive. That also is right, because it is entirely natural for the strong to vanquish the weak. In all but name, the masses are slaves to the classes, and that also is right, because the masses are poor and the classes are rich, and wealth is power and poverty is weakness and weakness is contemptible."

"But Death levels all," said Mr. Humble thoughtfully.

Miserleigh croaked something in reply which Mr. Humble did not hear and about which he did not

care to inquire, and so he turned to his duties, and Sol Miserleigh resumed his seat at his desk, unlocked an inner drawer, took from it a scrap of paper and examined it carefully. Finally he returned the paper to its place, closed his desk, locked it and said to himself in a low tone, but which Mr. Humble heard distinctly:

"Yes, the scheme has succeeded beyond a shadow of doubt. I was quite sure that it would — the fellow is so pliant ! It is the usual fatal step in a rapid life: Fashionable society and flummery — moral laxity — extravagance — forgery ! and the last step cannot be retraced. I must act at once; an hour hence may be too late."

Rising hastily from his chair, Sol Miserleigh put on his hat, great-coat and gloves, and as he opened the front door said gruffly to Mr. Humble: "When Sam Slick comes in, tell him that I have gone to see George Langdon at his lodgings, and that he must come there immediately." Then he went out on the pavement, closed the office door and hurried away.

Joshua Humble placed his pen gently in the pen rack upon his desk, clambered down from his high stool, took a bunch of keys from his pocket, went over to Miserleigh's desk, opened it, unlocked and opened the secret drawer, drew forth the scrap of paper which so deeply interested Sol Miserleigh, went leisurely to his own desk, made a copy of the mysterious document, and put it in his pocket; re-

turned the original paper to its hiding place, closed and locked the desk, climbed up on his perch and quietly resumed his duties.

He had not written more than a dozen words when the office door suddenly opened and Sam Slick entered with a bounding whirling motion, caused doubtless, by vibrations in his head produced by the effervescence of champagne, which he had imbibed at a club banquet during the previous night. In his gyrations he knocked over a chair, overturned a spittoon and finally collided violently with Mr. Humble's stool, almost knocking that quiet gentleman from his perch.

"Oh! I beg pardon!" ejaculated Mr. Slick in a mock tone of apology as he sank down upon a chair. "I'm a human cyclone this morning and it is not easy for me to stop when I begin to whirl. Where's old Miserleigh?"

Mr. Humble put down his pen, turned slowly around upon his stool, raised his spectacles from before his eyes and left them resting upon his forehead. His face was flushed, his features were rigid and there was a peculiar expression in his eyes which surprised and awed Mr. Slick and greatly modified his hilarity. If he had been watching beside a corpse which had suddenly come to life, risen and walked before him, he could not have been more shocked; and, as he gazed in blank amazement and bewilderment, up into that stern and almost supernatural face,

it swiftly dawned upon his mind that he was indeed in the presence of a spirit that had just risen from a long sleep like unto death.

"If you refer to my employer," replied Mr. Humble in a low voice, but every word of which sounded to his listener like the sharp clang of a high-toned bell, "I answer that he left this office a few minutes ago, and instructed me to inform you that he has gone to call on George Langdon at his lodgings, and will be glad if you will join him there as soon as possible."

Having delivered the message in low measured tones, slowly and with peculiar emphasis, Mr. Humble turned around to his desk and silently resumed his labors. For several minutes Mr. Slick sat still, with his eyes half closed dreamily. Finally he took off his hat, placed it on the floor beside his chair, rubbed his head vigorously with both hands, gazed out of the window upon the street and muttered reflectively:

"Just so! Just what I anticipated; gone to call on George Langdon; another turn of the screw and more financial blood-letting! Well, I presume I must obey, but I don't like the scheme, for the sapling is so young and green, and bleeds so easily and freely, that, hardened sinner as I am, I really feel ashamed to assist in skinning him!"

He sat mute and still for a few moments, drumming nervously on the arms of his chair with his fingers

and continued to gaze out upon the street. Finally, impelled by a sudden impulse as one who has screwed up his courage to perform a difficult and disagreeable task, Mr. Slick arose from his chair, went out upon the street and walked rapidly away. At the corner of Fourth and Olive streets he turned south, passing the Planter's House and the Court House, and finally ascended a flight of stone steps to the doorway of a residence, rang the door bell and was ushered into a reception room where he found Sol Miserleigh alone walking the floor impatiently.

CHAPTER III.

THE PLUCKING OF A GREEN GOSLING.

"I am not too late, I observe," said Mr. Slick to Sol. Miserleigh as the latter continued to walk the floor of the reception room of George Langdon's lodging house.

"No," replied Miserleigh as he paused and listened. "Just in time I think, for I hear someone coming down the stairs."

A moment later the hall door opened and a young man entered and exclaimed, with a slight quiver in his voice:

"Ah, Mr. Miserleigh, and Mr. Slick!" (shaking hands with each in turn) "good morning, gentlemen. You called to see me?"

Sol. Miserleigh elevated his chin a trifle, shrugged his shoulders, gazed coldly at the young man who greeted him and replied in a harsh tone: "Well, yes, Mr. Langdon, we wish to confer with you about a very important matter, namely, a certain promissory note for five hundred dollars, executed by you three days ago, and on which appears as indorser the name of William Barnes. There are grave doubts concerning the genuineness of that signa-

ture; in fact it is evidently a forgery, clumsily executed.

"There, enough of that, Mr. Miserleigh—quite enough of that kind of talk!" interrupted Langdon hotly. "I understand what you refer to, but I would much prefer to have you use milder and more correct terms. The signature to which you allude is not a forgery per se and consequently it is in no respect fraudulent. To simplify the matter I will admit frankly, William Barnes did not personally place his signature upon that note and no attempt was made to imitate his peculiar handwriting. It is the name of my dear old uncle, written by myself and he will pay the note promptly at maturity without a word of protest. He may privately lecture me therefor, in a mild fashion—more caressing than reproachful—God bless him! and warn me not to practice on any body else, and there the matter will end. I gave the note in payment of a debt of honor; so you see your mountain of accusation has shrunk into a molehill of very small proportions."

"George Langdon," responded Miserleigh in a serious tone, "of course you are nothing to me personally, but you are young and inexperienced and it is certainly very regrettable that at the beginning of life you are to be overwhelmed with shame and disgrace. I tell you truly and solemnly that unless you act at once in strict accordance with my suggestions, you will be in prison under a charge of

forgery in less than one hour from this moment! No attempt will be made to collect your note in the manner to which you refer, because your disgrace would be far more satisfactory to its present holder than five times the amount of money which you say your uncle would give in exchange for it. Your note will never be presented to your uncle for payment. He will be compelled to appear in court and testify that he did not sign it, and thus the crime of forgery will be fixed upon you and you will go to the penitentiary. Your uncle will be powerless to shield you from the consequences of your act."

"I did not anticipate that the note would fall into hostile hands," replied Langdon thoughtfully, "and I would be glad to know the name of the person who would lose five hundred dollars that I might be disgraced and imprisoned. Will you be kind enough to tell me Mr. Miserleigh?"

"No," was the blunt reply, "I will not enlighten you on that point, because it is a matter entirely personal with me and not at all important to you, except as a personal satisfaction, because you would be powerless to redress any wrong of which you may imagine yourself to be the victim in that connection; but, coming back to the only important point in this unfortunate affair in which you have become involved, I will state positively for your information, if you do not already comprehend it, that your act in signing your uncle's name as his signature does

not wholly concern him, but constitutes a crime against the state, the penalty for which is imprisonment in the penitentiary.

"You take a very serious view of what seems to me only a trifling affair," replied Langdon, falteringly, "but before we proceed further I will ask you to tell me frankly wherein your personal interests are involved. Why have you sought and obtained this information? and if you propose to aid me, as I infer you do, what are your plans?"

• "Langdon," replied Miserleigh, slowly, "I will answer your questions plainly and briefly as you request. My interest in this affair is merely for my personal gain. I am a dealer in notes, mortgages, stocks and bonds, and I never for one moment allow sentiment to interfere with my business interests. In me you have not a generous disinterested champion, for I would have allowed you to go to the penitentiary without experiencing one pang of regret unless it was to my personal interest to prevent that result. I have sought and obtained the information that I have communicated to you with the sole purpose of making you pay me for my trouble in order that you may escape the consequences of your folly. Listen attentively, and think fast, for time is precious to you, and I have no patience to repeat. You must leave this city immediately. My friend Slick will accompany you as your guard and assistant and will put you in a safe place where you will not be mo-

lested. In the meantime I will purchase the note for you and you will thus be able to recover and destroy the evidence of your folly."

Young Langdon had listened breathlessly to Miserleigh's rude blunt statement of his objects in the matter, and in the beginning, his soul burned with indignation, but as Miserleigh presented his plan of escape in terms so simple and lucid, his resentment gave place to intense interest and he was ready to comply with the terms offered to him, before the philanthropist (?) had spoken the last words. . .

"Mr. Miserleigh," he said, hoarsely, "I have never yet seen the man I was afraid of, and I want to tell you right now that nothing you can say or do can intimidate me in the least. I think you know something of our family—enough, at least, to be convinced there is not a cowardly instinct in any of our clan. I have weighed what you have said concerning your motives in this affair and I must give you the distinction of being the most cold-blooded and mercenary individual that I have ever known! But even the Devil, when it is clearly to his own personal interest, may do a good turn for an unfortunate those of Satan under similar circumstances. I would not trust you a hair's breath under any conditions where your personal interests might diverge from mine, but I understand perfectly that you are anxious to assist me out of this difficulty for pay, and as I am entirely willing to pay for your help to

the utmost limit of my means, I accept your offer and will be guided by your counsel."

"Very well," answered Miserleigh in a tone expressive of relief and satisfaction, as he flashed a significant glance toward Mr. Slick, receiving in return a glance of intense disdain which he did not correctly interpret. "Very well," he repeated hastily, "then we have not a moment to spare; even now it may be too late." Glancing at his watch he added: "The train is due to depart in forty-five minutes. The important thing for you to do is to get on that train and out of this city. Mr. Slick will afterwards decide as to your final destination. Your note is for five hundred dollars. I will probably have to pay a hundred dollars premium to get it. Furthermore, I must have pay for my trouble, say five hundred dollars; then Mr. Slick must have pay for his trouble, say five hundred dollars; altogether sixteen hundred dollars will place the note in your hands; but just how soon it can be accomplished will depend upon circumstances. I will take your I. O. U. for sixteen hundred dollars, payable ninety days from to-day and thus you will find a safe way out of your troubles."

"But I cannot pay that amount within that time," replied Langdan earnestly.

"Pay what you can at that time and I will give you all the time you need on the balance," said Miserleigh, as he took from his pocket a fountain pen

and a book of blank promissory notes, which he handed to Langdon, who immediately filled out and signed a note for the stipulated amount. "Now make a note for one thousand dollars and I will send you five hundred in cash by Humble before you leave. You will need money for expenses," said Miserleigh in a patronizing tone.

"Yes," replied Langdon, as he filled out another blank with unsteady hands, "but for how long?"

"Six months."

"Very well," and a moment later Langdon handed the note to Miserleigh, saying as he did so: "It must be done, but that is an enormous rate of interest—simply cold-blooded, vulgar robbery!"

"I presume it looks that way to you," replied Miserleigh as he received the notes and placed them in his pocket, "but it is only a plain business transaction. Remember boy, that those who dance must pay the fiddler. You are buying a little experience which in future will be worth a great deal more to you than the price you are paying, and if I choose to turn your folly to my pecuniary advantage that is my affair, not yours." Then he tore a leaf from the book of blank notes and wrote on the unprinted side the following:

"Slick: This is a profitable customer and we must retain his patronage regardless of cost. William Barnes died of heart disease early this morning and this boy is his sole heir. He must be kept as

long as possible in utter ignorance of his uncle's death. You must help him spend money. I will furnish what he needs and take his notes for double the amount, and thus we will eventually absorb his entire inheritance. Last night I bought the note which is giving him so much trouble and therefore there can be no complications. You have only to do your part with your usual skill and I will attend to the rest. Hurry!"

Then Miserleigh handed the message to Mr. Slick saying merely as he buttoned his overcoat and prepared to go:

"Those are your instructions, and if you will follow them faithfully, as you doubtless will, our way out of this difficulty will be safe and easy. If you need more money draw on me at sight and take Langdon's note for double the amount of your draft. That is about right as I may have to wait several years for my money and may possibly lose it entirely; therefore I must be paid, at least in prospect, in proportion to the risk. And now, Mr. Slick, good bye; and Mr. Langdon also. When we again meet I trust it will be under more agreeable circumstance than those surrounding this parting." As he spoke, Sol. Miserleigh grasped with his cold clammy fingers the warm hands of Slick and Langdon, and as he left them he added:

"I will send Humble with the money and a carriage within fifteen minutes. Good bye!"

As Miserleigh closed the door and hurried down the steps to the pavement, Langdon hastened up stairs to arrange his baggage while Mr. Slick sat down by the front window, lighted a cigar and for the first time read what Miserleigh had written on the back of the blank note.

"It's a shame!" he muttered in disgust as he folded up the paper and put it carefully away in his pocket. "'Tis a burning shame to pluck a young gosling in that merciless manner! Why, the boy is only just out of his teens—barely of age—and doubtless, that gambling incident and mild form of forgery is his first misstep, which I see plainly was the result of a vile conspiracy! I'll wager a thousand to one that old Miserleigh was the guiding spirit—the very head-devil who, through the instrumentality of another person, put into the gosling's head the idea of signing his uncle's name to the note as indorser. It is simply an outrageous scheme for plunder, and, while I'm no saint, but on the contrary, a confirmed sinner and a contemptible confidence man, I'm not a vulgar robber, nor a corrupter of the innocent, nor a betrayer of the guileless; why the boy is as pliant and unsuspecting as a pure woman fresh from a convent, and I don't want to be instrumental in casting the damning blight of sin upon his pure young soul, and I—well, I'll consider the matter more fully hereafter. A confidence man should have no scruples—no conscience,

and his motto should be: "The end justifies the means," and he should live up to it."

The half audible reflections of Samuel Slick were cut short by the entrance of George Langdon with overcoat and hat on and a valise in his hand, and a few moments later the door bell rang and Joshua Humble was ushered into the room by a servant. There was a troubled expression on his face as Mr. Humble handed a roll of bank bills to Mr. Langdon, and said: "The carriage is waiting and you have barely time to reach the depot before the departure of the train."

As Langdon took the money from Mr. Humble's hands he observed that they trembled, and glancing up into Mr. Humble's face he was shocked by its deathlike pallor, and was upon the point of asking the cause, but as time was pressing he repressed his sympathetic inquiry and hastened out of the house and down the steps to the pavement. Mr. Slick was the first to reach the carriage, and as he grasped the handle of the door to open it, Mr. Humble stepped up quickly behind Langdon and whispered in his ear:

"Barnes is dead! Miserleigh has your note—beware!"

"Langdon with one foot on the carriage step glanced swiftly around over his shoulder into the pallid face of Joshua Humble and hesitated a moment, having failed to hear correctly and being un-

able to comprehend the brief warning, but quickly recovering his self-possession he merely nodded in reply and stepping hurriedly into the carriage, was whirled away as he waved adieu to Joshua Humble standing on the curb of the pavement in an attitude expressive of extreme dejection.

CHAPTER IV.

A SOOTHING BALM FOR A WOUNDED SPIRIT.

"Whisht, Mick an' Denny. Whisht I say! 'Tis a sin an' a shame t' be singin' an' blatherin' o'er yr' mugs o' beer w'en that good mon lies dead o'er there. Put up yr' keards noo an dhrink up yr' beer in silence oot o' respect t' th' mimory o' Will'm Barnes—rist his soul!" ..

So said Mrs. Katie O'Keefe to her two sons who had just returned from the corner grocery with a pitcher of beer, and in their own cosy little room in their home were enjoying a game of cards accompanied by good old Irish songs.

They had returned to their home from the labors of the day in a neighboring factory; it was Saturday night and they were happy in anticipation of the coming day of rest. Their good old widowed mother had also finished her day's labor and had retired to her own room which adjoined that of her son's and sat there thinking of the good man whose life had so suddenly terminated; and the merry laughter, jests and songs of her boys grated harshly upon her nerves.

"Sure, mither," replied Mick, the elder, in a

respectful, kind tone, "we forgot that." Then they silently finished their mugs of beer, went into their mother's room and quietly sat down near her.

"Yis darlints," continued the mother in a low sad voice, "I ha' bin wapin' in me 'art all day long since I first heard o' our good friend's taken off. Ah! many a poor soul'll miss him this winter w'en th' snow is deep an th' wind is cold; an' w'en Christmas time comes, many a poor urchin 'll play wi' rag dolls and ol' folks'll shiver o'er smokin' sulphur lumps who in times gone by were made comfortable an' happy by his kind an' blessed gifts o' coal an' clothes an' food an' toys."

"Aye, mither dear," said Mick, sorrowfully, an' we'll miss him too, for he niver forgot us a Christmas morning. An' last winter, w'en th' factory shut down during the coldest days o' the year, he sent us a load o' coal w'en he saw me siftin' th' snow for a few stray lumps in the back yard."

Suddenly, and with startling effect a shrill quacking voice in an adjoining room broke rudely in upon the sad conversation of Mrs. O'Keefe and her sons with these words:

"Well, Jerusha, what's done can't be undone. He lies over there in his great house cold and dead, an' no wife nor child to mourn for him, an' nobody else'll mourn for him, I reckon, for he was an orful ol' sinner they say!"

"I think you're dead wrong there," responded

another quacking voice; "dead wrong Mrs. Sly, but howsomever, it's not my place to take his part, for he was no kin 't me. Jerusha Snuffer has no sich highfalutin kin, but Mr. Branes was always kind to me, and I am sorry that he is dead."

"They say," piped another voice that he was a good deal richer than people thought him to be. The lawyers were over there this afternoon huntin' up his papers before he has got cold, and they found, Oh, ever so much money and checks an' bonds in his big iron safe in his bed room! Leastwise so ol' Betty Sommers, his housekeeper, told me this a'ter noon when I went over there to see w'at was go'in on. Law sakes! how the ol' woman did sniffle an' whine while she talked and groaned by turns! It just made my stomach rise to listen to her. An' she says—says she: 'Th' lawyers have had the police a lookin' all day a'ter th' young feller, his nephew, an' they can't find him nowhere! Law sakes! what a big funeral it will be, and with no blood relations as mourners if that young feller, Langdon, don't turn up in time! A big funeral, an' no mourners! How queer! ah, how—"

Mrs. O'Keefe had been listening to the slanderous colloquy in the adjoining room which was the home of Mrs. Sly, and where the spinster, Jerusha Snuffer, and the widow, Becky Falser, were visitors. They had called on Mrs. Sly singly and without any previous arrangement to do so, but somehow

each of them intuitively knew that the other would go, if alive and able to walk. Each knew that the other could not resist the temptation to go and with the other two congenial companions discuss the horrifying details and circumstances surrounding the death of William Barnes, and with minds whet to the keenest possible edge of anticipation they had gone there, each loaded with choice bits of neighborhood gossip concerning the life and character of the deceased.

Mrs. O'Keefe was indignant beyond expression as she listened to the vile mouthings of the gossips and when Becky Falser predicted that there would be no mourners at the funeral, her anger swiftly swept aside the restraints of her better judgment, and with her clenched hand she knocked loudly on the thin wooden partition between the apartments and interrupted the conversation of the women with these words, uttered in a voice husky with suppressed rage:

"Sure there will be mourners! hundreds o' wapin ones at the funeral o' that good man that was, who lies o'er yonder! God be praised that he lived so long t' bless th' world wi' his gintle kindness t' the poor, an' t'is but th' likes o' y'ees that would raise th' voice t'spake th' way ye does."

To Mrs. O'Keefe's emphatic words of protest against their gross slander of the dead the gossiping occupants of the Sly apartments made no reply,

but continued in low tones to quack and jabber long after the O'Keefe family had retired for the night and in peaceful slumber found relief from the cares and vexations of life.

At that same hour, Joshua Humble in the profound stillness of his home, walked the floor of his sleeping room in the dim glow of a street lamp which came in through the window. His steps were slow and measured, his hands were clasped behind his back and with bowed head he paced to and fro while tears coursed down his face.

• "Am I a man, with the will power and mental vigor of the prime of life, or only a human derelict buffeted by the waves of adversity and ready to sink?" No, I am not a wreck and will never be! Here I am weeping like a grieved child from sheer vexation because I have a part to act and the scenes do not shift fast enough! The cruel wrongs which I have witnessed for many years, and my own degradation and mental anguish come trooping through my brain tonight, veritable phantoms whirling before the mirror of memory; wraiths of wrecked lives bearing records of ruined fortunes written in human blood. But vengeance to the author of those wrongs of which I have been a helpless witness is coming swift and sure by the death of William Barnes. The hosts of the Infernal have been fighting for Sol. Miserleigh since he robbed and degraded me, and vengeance has been long delayed—so long that his

very soul has become intoxicated with success and to him crime has become so familiar that his fox-like caution has given place to silly recklessness; and so, without even a faint realization of the fact, he has been weaving a web of crime about himself from which he cannot escape! He has outraged humanity, and Justice will be avenged; for Justice is God, and God is Law!"

"But what of that poor boy drifting helplessly away into the awful whirlpool of sin? and I, who alone of all his friends know his whereabouts and condition—I, perhaps the chosen instrument of God to rescue him from his awful peril, and I stand here and weep and sigh and wring my hands in impotent grief, when I should be strong, resolute and brave and go swift to his relief! But no, not now—not tonight. First let Miserleigh write and sign his own death warrant, as he will do tomorrow, on that holy day of rest, while the body of William Barnes is being borne away to its grave; yes, there alone in his office, locked and darkened, Sol Miserleigh will with his own hand decree and seal his own doom: Then, when that is done, Joshua Humble will do his duty, quickly and without fear!"

"Grandpa," said a little child in an adjoining room, in a voice expressive of intense sympathy and affection; "dear grandpa! why do you walk the floor and weep and talk so sadly? I have been lying here a long, long time listening to your crying talk,

and though I could not understand all you said, I have been crying too, for I knew you were in great trouble and I love you so much dear grandpa, that I am sorry too. May I come and put my arms around your neck and kiss and pet you and make you laugh and forget all about the bad—bad man who makes you cry?"

Joshua Humble paused and listened a moment in silence to the faint pleading words of little Alice, and then without reply which he could not make, because of a choking sensation in his throat, he walked quickly into the room where the child was, and took the little one in his arms from her bed. Then as the hot tears ran down his face he began walking the floor to and fro and sang to her in a low tremulous voice an old-time baby lullaby. An hour or more he walked and sang, while the child, with her tiny arms clasped lovingly around his neck, and her beautiful head with its wilderness of golden hair resting upon his shoulder gazed wistfully into his face. Finally her eyes slowly closed and her loving solicitude was forgotten in sleep. Then he placed her gently on his own bed, removed his coat and shoes and laid softly down beside her, and in dreamless restful slumber, the remembrance of his degradation and woe faded from his mind.

CHAPTER V.

A VERITABLE DANCE OF DEMONS.

The residence of Sol. Miserleigh was a queer old structure, built of rough lime-stone, and with the garden and lawn occupied an entire block in the western suburbs. The surface of the lot was at its original elevation, that is to say, about eight feet above the streets, the edges of its four sides having been terraced down to a high wall of rough stone which formed the inclosure.

Originally the building and its surroundings had been very attractive, but at the time here referred to, an air of general untidiness and decay pervaded the entire premises, and to the casual observer it bore the appearance of having been long unoccupied. The lawn, which originally had been a model of skillful landscape gardening, had been wholly neglected and was worn into unevenness by the rainfall of many years. It was covered with a dense growth of common grass, and the shrubbery, from lack of pruning and cultivation, had relapsed into its original wildness. The climbing rose vines, which formerly adorned a beautiful arbor, had become but a dense growth of brambles and had toppled over to the

ground with the broken and decayed woodwork which formerly held it in an upright position.

On the south side of the inclosure a heavy iron gate, of recent construction, the top of which terminated in a row of sharp iron spikes, was the only entrance to the premises; the rear entrance and carriageway having been closed by a tall fence of rough boards when Miserleigh secured possession of the property. The building was of a peculiar style of architecture, a miniature castle with a single square tower at one corner, flanked by the main edifice which was also square and massive. It consisted of two tall stories surmounted by a roof of slate with two dormer windows on each side. The main building contained twelve rooms, six on each floor, and the tower, three rooms, one on each floor. The original owner had built the house for his home. He was very wealthy, had traveled in Europe and had planned it after an old English baronial residence, and everything used in its construction was of the best quality. It was indeed a palace fit for the home of a prince.

When Sol. Miserleigh became the legal owner of the premises and its furnishings, everything was in good condition. He simply moved in and took possession of everything, including china and silverware. The former owner and his family merely walked out of the house when Miserleigh and his mother and sister walked in. It was a simple process of transfer,

requiring only one dray to bring the baggage of those who came, and to remove from the premises the few personal belongings of those who departed. But twenty-four years of wear and neglect, the ravages of insects and mildew and virtual abandonment to the canker of Time, had converted every article within the mansion into hopeless wreck. Everywhere dirt and grime, ruin, decay and utter desolation!

And this was the home of Sol. Miserleigh and of his mother and sister. The mother had lived seventy years and had withered to a mere skeleton, but she was tall and strong and walked with a quick elastic tread. Her face was a mass of deep wrinkles which lay in rigid folds in many different angles; her mouth was large, and from her thin ashen lips from either jaw two black jagged teeth protruded. Her eyes cold, gray and glittering bulged outward in their sockets exposing the larger portion of their white surfaces interlaced with bright scarlet veins, and her nose was long and slim with a slight downward curve at the end. Her thin snow-white hair was combed back from her low retreating forehead, and the expression of her face was simply and wholly demoniacal. Her apparel was scant and slovenly in the extreme, old and worn, patched and tattered.

Her daughter was perhaps forty years old, but totally unlike her mother in all respects; her features were regular; her eyes dark blue and clear; her hair

long, soft and golden; her form full and symmetrical and she had evidently been very beautiful in her youth. But she was a hopeless, harmless maniac, and her feeble mind continually wandered in a labyrinth of weird imaginings, doubtless influenced and given form and substance by her horrible surroundings and associations. She occupied alone the second story room in the tower and wandered over the premises at will at all times of day and night and talked and jabbered and jeered at the phantom forms which her fevered imagination pictured to her amid the gloom and stillness of night, under the deep shadows of the dense foliage on the lawn.

An aged negro man and his wife occupied a building within the inclosure which had been constructed for and used as a stable by the original owner, and these two feeble minded and decrepit persons performed the entire labors of the household for a mere house in which they lived.

In the dusk of evening of that dreary November day on which William Barnes had so suddenly given up his life, Sol. Miserleigh hurried homeward from his office where he had been detained later than usual, and as the last gleam of daylight disappeared, giving place to intense darkness, he swung open the iron gate in front of his residence, closed and locked it, hurried up the paved walk to the entrance and rang the door bell. His summons was answered by the man servant who opened the door in silence, and

Miserleigh, without even a nod of recognition or a word of greeting entered, and pausing in the hall only long enough to deposit his wrappings on the hat and coat rack, passed on into the dining apartment. The room was large and bore traces of former elegance, but its frescoed walls were marred and stained and its costly furniture broken and covered with grime—the accumulation of many years. The apartment was lighted by a single lamp suspended from the ceiling, the once beautiful chandeliers still remaining but broken and long unused.

Mrs. Miserleigh and Aurelia were seated on either side of a grate in which a few burning lumps of coal hissed and sputtered, and the women were leaning forward holding their hands over the feeble blaze. The atmosphere of the room was damp and chill, and being thinly clad, the women were very uncomfortable, although they did not seem to be conscious of misery. As Sol. entered the room and closed the door Mrs. Miserleigh glanced at the clock on the mantel and said to him:

“Well, you’ve come at last!”

“Yes, I am here,” he replied. “What of it?”

“The supper is all spoiled waiting for you.”

“A great pity! there’s such a great quantity, and so choice and well cooked no doubt! But come,” he added in a milder tone, “let us not quarrel to-night, but rather rejoice together, for success is coming our way at last and our reward for long

years of scheming and patient waiting is upon the very verge of realization!"

"What! What has happened—who is dead? I know that somebody is dead! Tell me quickly!" she demanded, almost in a shriek rising from her chair.

"Be quiet," replied Sol. tremulously. "I cannot tell you here, at least not all—only this much: William Barnes is dead!"

Mrs. Miserleigh stared vacantly at the wall as Sol. talked and did not seem to comprehend his words. She clutched the back of her chair and leaned on it for support. She gasped as one in the throes of death, and with her disengaged hand tore open the dress at her throat. She tried to speak but only a horrible gurgling sound came from her lips. Sol. was shocked but not frightened by her peculiar behavior; he had often seen her in violent paroxysms of emotion and knew that no serious consequences would ensue, but he was totally unprepared for the denouement. Suddenly her power of utterance returned to her and from her shriveled lips came forth horrible laughter. With one hand grasping the back of the chair her other arm was outstretched toward him, her long bony fingers clutching the air. For several minutes she continued to laugh and wave her hands and sway her body as in the act of dancing, while Sol. stood still and speechless against the wall.

"Gone mad!" he said in a husky whisper, as his

voice came back to him, and he began to tremble and an expression of amazement and terror came upon his face. "Gone mad—stark mad with joy! It is an awful sight to behold, awful! awful!" and he covered his face with his hands and shivered.

"She's just like me, now," shrieked mad Aurelia, "just like me!" and springing to her feet she began whirling in graceful circles, swinging her arms above her head and shouting and laughing as only a maniac has the power to do.

The sudden and startling demonstration of Aurelia served to revive the waning reason of the mother, who gradually recovered her self-possession and with a wonderful exhibition of strength for one so aged and emaciated, she seized Aurelia by the shoulders and forced her violently down upon the chair from which she had risen. "Be quiet! Sit still!" said the mother harshly, and Aurelia obeyed. Then Mrs. Miserleigh turned to Sol. and said passionately:

"Dead? William Barnes dead, did you say?" Then advancing she grasped him rudely by the shoulders and said tremulously in a loud whisper: "It is a lie! I say it is a lie! You did not have the courage—the nerve to—"

"Hush, hush! interrupted Sol. beseechingly, "there are other ears than ours here. Calm yourself and control your feelings. Sit down and be quiet

and after supper you shall know all that has happened and nothing but the plain and exact truth."

Then he ordered the servants to bring in the food, and as he and his mother took seats at the table he turned to his sister who sat by the fire gazing silently at the feeble blaze, and said to her in a tone in which there was a slight expression of kindness: "Come, Aurelia, supper is ready;" and when she had taken a seat at the table, he sat down by her side in silence, and when the servants had brought in the food and placed it before them, those three strange beings sat there, and more like hungry beasts than human creatures, devoured the food with almost ferocious greed. Twenty minutes, perhaps, they sat munching their food in silence, until the last bone had been picked and licked clean, the last crumb of bread had disappeared and the last drop of tea had been drained from the pot, and then as they arose from their chairs, Sol. ordered the servants to remove the empty dishes from the table, and after he and his mother had taken seats by the fire he turned to Aurelia and said savagely: "Now go to your room, madcap, and stay there until morning. Go!"

CHAPTER VI.

MAD AURELIA'S MOURNFUL REMINISCENCES.

But Aurelia did not seem to hear her brother's command; at least, she did not heed it, but remained standing by the table with her hands clasped across her bosom. Her head drooped over on her shoulder, her eyes were fixed upon a corner of the ceiling, her form swayed to and fro, and, finally from her parted lips came forth a low mournful wail.

Sol. hastily arose from his chair, placed his hand rudely upon her shoulder and pushed her violently toward the door, saying:

"I told you to go to your room. Now go, and cease your howling!"

"Yes—yes, I am going, brother Sol; I will go soon, but first tell me, oh, tell me, who is dead? I heard you say somebody is dead—William Barnes, I think you said, but I cannot believe, no—no, it cannot be! It is not mine—not my own—but some other William Barnes that is dead. No, my William is not dead, for he was here last night—out there with me on the lawn. Ah! he was so handsome and so strong and full of life and hope; and we sat together on the bench under the rose arbor and talked

together in loving whispers until the moon, thinking our wooing too sacred to gaze upon, covered its face and vanished and then we kissed and said: "Good night," and he went merrily away to his home and I joyfully to my chamber, to sleep and dream of my dear one!"

She had withdrawn her hands from her bosom as she talked in a soft musical tone, and held them out beseechingly toward her brother, and as by chance her gaze rested upon them she paused and contemplated them a moment in silence and then said tremulously—while an expression of amazement came upon her face:

"Whose hands are those? not mine, surely not the hands of Aurelia whom everybody calls beautiful! No, no! not my hands, surely not mine; for last night—only last night my hands were soft, and white, and dimpled; and as William held them in his soft, warm palms he said that they throbbed and fluttered like two tiny birds in the rude grasp of the poacher. And yet, they seem to be my hands for they are fastened to my arms—and, see! I can move the fingers! Ah! what will my William say when he comes to-night? He will not touch those withered fingers for they are not human hands, but claws! horrible claws!"

As she held up her hands and spread them out in the dim light of the smoking lamp, her gaze chanced to rest upon the large cracked mirror of the

sideboard on the opposite side of the room which reflected her image, greatly distorted by reason of its web-like fractures, and she reeled backward in terror.

"Whose face is that? Ugh! What a horrible face!" she shrieked. "It is not mine—it cannot be mine! the face that yesterday everybody called beautiful; the face that William loved and called divine! No! it is the face and form of a demon—a female wraith who swallowed me while I slept to-day, and these are her hands! But when William, my brave and true one, comes, he will slay the monster in whom I am entombed, and will release me; and then we will be married again, but this time before the whole world in spite of mother, and in spite of you, brother Sol., for I will convince him that your cruel insinuations concerning my chastity are false! false as Satan's words, and he will joyfully take me away from this awful place to his own beautiful home, where I will always remain its proud and happy mistress and the idol of its master's heart!"

"She has a faint glimmering of memory and reason, to-night," said Sol in a low voice to his mother, who merely nodded in reply.

"Yes, I will convince my William," continued Aurelia, "that the children, our beautiful babes are his children, and he will go and rescue them from the

demon who carried them away this morning—stole them from my arms while I was sleeping!”

Sol. Miserleigh had evidently heard enough to greatly disturb his conscience, which, although so long under the deadening influence of crime had apparently, for the moment, been quickened to life by the sad ravings of his sister, for his face was white and his lips were tightly drawn across his teeth. He trembled violently and breathed like one in convulsions.

“Go!” he said hoarsely, as he seized her by the arm and pushed her violently out into the hall. “Go to your room and sleep!”

CHAPTER VII.

A DRAMATIC INTERVIEW.

As Sol. Miserleigh thrust Aurelia out into the hall from the dining room, his conscience, which had been sorely pricked and chafed by her mournful wailings, relapsed again into its former paralyzed condition and the color came back to his face and the keen greedy expression returned to his eyes. His mind had been so thoroughly preoccupied by his sister's graphic though disjointed recital of her wrongs, that he had failed to observe the presence of the servants in the open doorway between the dining room and kitchen where they had observed and heard all that had been done and said. But his mind was not in the least perturbed by that discovery because he believed them to be wholly incapable of understanding the significance of Aurelia's revelation; but, nevertheless, he was angry and in a harsh and peremptory tone commanded them to remove the dishes from the dining table, and after that had been done, he closed and locked the kitchen door, drew his chair close by his mother's side before the few dying embers in the grate and leaning over toward her said in a low voice :

"You must be calm, else you will surely bring us to destruction. Those black imps in the kitchen are nearly frightened out of their wits and I will have to invent some explanation for your conduct. Upon my word it was a veritable dance of demons!"

"I know," she replied, "I know that I lost my self control for the moment, in the mad delirium of joy which swept over my soul! Sol., my son, the death of William Barnes, if accomplished by the very means and in the precise manner planned by me, is the perfect fruition—the actual accomplishment of what has been to me, many, many years—the long intense agony of desire for revenge! You seem to partially comprehend, but you only scratch the surface in your efforts to uncover the main-spring of my motives. You know but a small portion of the secret of my intense hatred of William Barnes, for I have kept you groping in darkness in that relation all—all your life. What you are—soulless, cruel, cold, crafty, grasping and dishonest—I have made you by a careful course of training upward from your very cradle until now, in order that you might be a fit instrument for the accomplishment of my vengeance! You think that my hatred of William Barnes dates from the time of the occurrence of a certain tragedy out by the lake—from fear that he might succeed in his life-long efforts to unravel the mystery and bring the perpetrators of that crime to the scaffold. I tell you no! It goes back far beyond that time,

even to the early days of his father's life—his father—who died—you know how! Ah, even now I can see him lying there under the willows on the shore of Creve Coeur Lake, with that horrible wound in his breast and his white hair stained with his blood! I shall never forget that night when you cowered away from that spot like a hunted hyena, and cast that bloody knife far out into the lake. You did not even pause to wash the blood from your hands, but ran away like a wounded hound and left me alone with the ghastly dead."

Sol. Miserleigh's face was deathly white and he trembled like one with palsy.

"Enough—enough of that," he said appealingly. "In God's name talk no more of that or you'll drive me mad! I believe we will all go mad eventually if we are not crack-brained already. I sometimes think that both you and I are scarcely more sane than sister Aurelia. How horribly we live, and we have never lived better than we do now, save when we first occupied this house twenty-four years ago. The smell of the grave is everywhere within this dreadful inclosure and through the halls and abandoned rooms of this great half-ruined house, phantom forms wander at night, and when storms beat upon it they revel in the upper room of the tower, like drunken seamen and come and rattle the shutters of my windows and jeer and call my name and talk of murder!"

"Ah," she responded, scornfully, "I see you still have a conscience. I thought it dead long—long years ago. I flattered myself that I had strangled it to death while you were still in your teens. But perhaps it is not your conscience which troubles you, but your cowardly disposition. You do not know it, but the fact remains that you are half Barnes and partake of their—"

"What do you mean?" he demanded fiercely.

"I'll not tell you now," she replied after a brief hesitation. "No, not now, but after you have accomplished all—when you have faithfully executed my plans and reaped your reward for your fidelity; when you have secured for yourself the greater part of the Barnes estate—mind you, only the greater part—for you shall not have all of it, that boy must have some—then you shall know all! But one thing I want to make clear to you now, what you have always misunderstood, and that is, the true relations which existed between Aurelia and William Barnes."

"What is there about that which I do not already know?" he asked eagerly.

"This: Aurelia and William Barnes were legally married, in secret, the day before she became of age and the following morning he would have come here and taken her to his home as his wife."

"Great God!" he groaned and buried his face in his hands.

"Don't call on God," she replied tauntingly, "for

if there is really such a Being, He would not heed the prayer of a Barnes!"

Apparently he did not hear her last remark, but if so, he did not heed it, for he remained in that groveling attitude in silence several minutes. Finally he raised his head and still groveling and trembling pitifully he spoke in a faint voice addressing her:

"And that very night you sent me to William Barnes to poison his mind against Aurelia by impeaching her chastity, and he knocked me down and kicked me out of his house and into the mud and filth of the street, and would have broken every bone in my body but for the fortunate interference of a police officer. But the poison of my slander had lodged in his soul and you put more there by intrigue, by your assumed sorrowful confidences to your servants who spread the vile slander abroad through their associates until even the upper circles of society buzzed and echoed the horrible lie, and it drove the poor girl mad!"

"That is the correct history of the affair," she replied calmly.

"It was an infamous conspiracy against the very life of your own daughter!" he continued, vehemently; "upon my word, I am afraid of you! You are a horrible monster! horrible beyond conception!" and he moved his chair away from her to the other side of the fireplace.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MOTHER'S SAVAGE WARNING TO HER SON.

A brief interval of silence ensued during which the expression of Mrs. Miserleigh's face became, if possible, more repulsive than before, and then she arose to her feet and walked over to where Sol sat shivering and cowering in abject fear, and grasping him firmly by the shoulder she said angrily:

"I shall make no apology to you nor to anybody else for anything that I have ever done. I have sown and reaped and the harvest is all mine. True, I did not intend to drive the girl mad, but I would not have hesitated in the execution of my plans if in the beginning I had foreseen that result. I would have plunged a knife into her heart rather than that she should have become the acknowledged wife of my bitterest enemy!"

"That would have been far more merciful than the wound which you inflicted within her soul! But why did you allow Barnes to visit her when you must have known in advance what the final result would be?" he asked as he arose and pushed her hand from his shoulder.

"I did not intend that such should be the result,"

she replied. "I only intended to allow them to bill and coo for a brief space of time and then to clip their wings before they could fly away together. You well know that it was my purpose to get him within my grasp and then to crush him—crush out his very life! Twice I could have sprung my trap and caught my game, but you staid my hand, because you had not accomplished your purpose, which you presumed to be identical with mine. You wanted his money, all—all of it—the entire Barnes estate—and you could not get even a farthing of it. And so while we hesitated the golden opportunity vanished and the birds came out in full feather and mated, and—you know the rest."

"And now, a few more words and I am done. Did William Barnes die of disease?"

"No; he died of Amos the Fox."

"Quickly?"

"Instantly! Your potion did the work as well as you could possibly wish."

She laughed, but the sound was like the snarl of a wild beast.

"And when will he be put in the ground?"

"At four o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"And you will attend the funeral?"

"Yes, if you think best."

"Go, and if you can shed a few crocodile tears, do so, they will help our cause; yes, weep and mourn! Ha, ha, ha! Where's the boy?"

"This morning I sent him out of town in charge of Sam Slick. Langdon does not know of Barnes' death. It is a game of skin and bleed."

"Do you know who that boy is?"

"Why, Barnes' nephew, of course."

"Nothing of the kind; now look at me, if you can keep your wavering eyes in one position a few minutes, and listen. You may bleed him financially to the utmost limit of your desire, but you shall not crush him nor shall you harm his person in any way. He is lawful heir to the Barnes' estate, and were it not for my promise to you he should possess and enjoy it in safety and peace. Even as it is, you shall not beggar him while I live, and if you even attempt it after I have plunged into the dark unknown, I will come back and haunt you until you will rush headlong to meet me in that awful vale of shadows! Take the greater part of the Barnes' wealth if you can get it and keep out of the penitentiary, but be satisfied with that for you will never need more. Remember, do that boy no bodily harm and leave him enough for a comfortable support. This is my command, and you dare not disobey it."

"I will respect your wishes," he replied meekly.

She looked into his face searchingly a few moments in silence, and she could hear the beating of his heart. Then she said slowly, by way of parting:

"Very well; now go to bed!" and without another

word he went to his room and crept shiveringly between the blankets, after having removed his shoes.

As Mrs. Miserleigh covered up the few burning coals in the grate, with fine ashes, she muttered to herself in a hoarse whisper:

"I have lived to witness the fruition of my fondest desire, but what awful sacrifices I have made for its accomplishment!"

Then she put out the light, felt her way with her hands along the wall to the door, passed out into the hall, into the reception room, crouched down upon a soft, drew a heavy woolen blanket over her, and thus another score had been added to the record of her wicked life.

CHAPTER IX.

EARLY MORNING INCIDENTS AT THE RESIDENCE OF JACOB BLUM.

"Who vas dat in the alley, Leah?" inquired Jacob Blum of his bed-ridden wife, in a frightened voice as he raised himself in bed and leaning partly on his left elbow shaded his eyes with his right hand, and endeavored to peer through the slats of the blinds of a window on the opposite side of the room, through which came the first gleam of early day dawn.

"I don't know who dat vos, Yacob, but it schleeps along like von o' de poys, aindt it?" responded Leah, evidently not at all frightened as she raised her feeble body to a sitting posture beside her spouse.

"Nein, I tinks nodd," whispered Jacob. "Shust geep schtill a leedle pit, und lischten."

Creep—creep! patter—patter! came the sound along the narrow paved alleyway, and then a brief pause, and then again advancing footsteps, evidently those of a very light person, shod with stockings or rubber shoes. Then came another pause and then a

light rap on the bed room door which opened upon the alleyway.

"Who vas dat?" demanded Jacob, sitting up straight in bed and shivering from fright.

"Open the door quick! Jake," came the faint reply of a man's voice accompanied by another and very impatient knock on the door.

"Got in Himmel! dat vas Amos de Fox, Leah," ejaculated Jacob as he slipped out of bed, jumped into his trousers almost at a single bound, hastened to the door, unbolted it, swung it open and said in a half whisper: "Gootness gerracious Amos! I tinks you would'nt be here for an hour yet, come in."

"Well, I am here a little ahead of the appointed time," replied Amos the Fox as he stepped into the room and softly closed the door, "but you see, Jacob, I had a much easier job than I anticipated, and I worked fast, and here I am, safe and sound and no 'cops' on my trail."

"Goot, goot!" replied Jacob, patting Amos playfully on the shoulder and leering into his face, "dat vas goot; und you fixed de lemon?"

"Well, I should remark!"

"Und he don't vake up?"

"No; he laid there sleeping like a hog."

"Und how you know he takes de lemon?"

"Know? well enough. It is his habit every morning when he wakes up to suck the juice of a lemon, and he puts one on a chair within easy reach when he

goes to bed. He is a bilious cuss and imagines that the lemon juice will keep him from having the ague. I fixed a lemon which I put on the chair and I brought away the one which he placed there before going to bed, and if he ever tackles my lemon he will never even kick afterwards and won't have the slightest suspicion what hurt him."

He—he, ho—ho!" giggled the Jew, again patting Amos playfully on the shoulder: "Vell dat vas goot! de ole vomans vas a rip schnorter, und don't you forget im, aindt it? How you indo de house get?"

"Opened the front door with my skeleton and found a clear runway. Not one of the inside doors locked and everybody in the house sound asleep."

"Und you get somedings—some monish?"

"No, you greedy old fool! that would have given the whole thing away. No, I did not take even a pin, only a lemon, and as I left mine in its place there was simply an even exchange and consequently no robbery. I came out by the way I entered the house—by the front door—and left it locked just as I found it. There were no 'cops' in sight, not a human soul on the street, for the fog is as thick and wet as ever dropped down on London."

"Vell, vell!" chuckled Jacob, as he put on his vest and coat and thrust his bare feet into a pair of slippers: "Vell, vell Amos, you vas a schlick von sure! Go indo de kitchen und I vake up Martha to cook us some preakfascht," and he led the way into

the kitchen and hastily built a fire in the stove, all the while ejaculating to Amos who sat on a low stool in a corner of the room; "Vell, vell, you vas a schlick von Amos und no mischdake!"

Soon Martha came into the room and greeted the Fox very pleasantly, but seemed considerably embarrassed, to hide which she began to chatter in broken dialect as she hurriedly cooked the food, while Jacob busied himself with keeping the stove piping hot. Martha talked very fast, and upon a great variety of subjects to which Amos responded in monosyllables, often ridiculously foreign to the subject; but Martha did not seem to notice his pre-occupation of mind and did not heed his uncertain and confused responses, and continued to pour forth a perfect volley of words quite incomprehensible except to trained ears. Finally in the very midst of her rambling, guttural discourse, she paused and listened, as did also her master and Amos the Fox, to the sound of approaching footsteps along the brick pavement of the alleyway.

"It vas Mose," said Jacob, to Amos in a tone of evident relief, "I wonder vy he come so soon?"

"It is not too early, six o'clock," replied the Fox, glancing at his watch, and that moment the door opened cautiously a little way, and a bushy head of curly black hair, partially covered by a ragged old cap, was thrust through the opening, and a grotesque Jewish face appeared, and its glittering eyes glanced

questioningly, first at Jacob, then at Martha and finally rested upon the face of Amos the Fox. It was an old face which appeared in the partially open doorway, and yet it was not wrinkled, nor were there any lines of age under its gleaming eyes, but its expression was aged—an indefinable something over all—denoting experience, intelligence and courage.

“Vat you schtand dere und keeps open de door for?” said Jacob, impatiently, as the head appeared and disappeared several times in quick succession. “Come in ye schneakin’ varmint, come in I say und schut de door!”

With a quick creeping movement the hesitating form glided sidewise into the room and closed the door softly behind him. It was the form of a diminutive hunchback, neither old nor young, neither man nor boy, and yet all of these in one. His arms and legs were, as to length, nearly equal to those of a man of medium height, and his hands and feet were of enormous size as compared with his stature, while the trunk of his body seemed utterly doubled up within itself to barely one-fourth the usual length of a human body of medium height. His head sat squarely down on his shoulders which curved upward from his short thin neck to their extreme points, and an immense hump extended upward on his back to a line nearly on a level with the tops of his ears. In his right hand he carried by a strap a bootblack’s outfit, consisting of a box, perhaps eight inches in

length by four inches in width and height, containing two brushes and a box of shoe blacking, while under his left arm several copies of a morning newspaper, very wet and much soiled were clasped against the side of his ragged and greasy jacket.

"Vell, vat you come home so soon for?" was Jacob's snarling inquiry of the human monstrosity, his unfortunate brother, as that individual silently deposited his shoe blacking outfit and newspapers on the floor in a corner of the room. "Vat you come home for I say, ven it vas more as half an hour 'fore daylight, Eh? I tole you to shday in front of old Barnes' big house und wait until he come oudt und den sell him a bapier und black his shoes. Vy you not shday und do as I tole you, Eh?"

"Vell, look-a-here Yacob," drawled the hunchback with an assumption of humbleness and innocence. "Zhust lischten a leedle, vile I exblain. Dot ole moke, Barnes, don't vont no bapier, cause vy? Cause he can't valk no more, und can't read no more—cause he's dedt—fell dedt mit heart disease only bout half-hour ago!"

"How you know?" demanded Jacob with feigned surprise, "how you know he's dedt?"

"Vell, I vas schtandin' on de udder side o' de sthreet und vaiten' for de ole moke to come oudt to go for his morning pitters to de saloon aroun de corner; und py und py I heard a screech in de big house, und somepody runnin' aroun' und more

screechin' und runnin' in de house, und den a great lubber of a feller come runnin' fon de house oudt und down de schteps und across de sthreet to de docthors, und pull de door pell like de tyful. Den de ole docthor pull up de vindow up und poke oudt his head oudt de vindow und ax him vot he vonts, und de feller at de door sez: 'Come quick dochter, Mischter Parnes falls down on de floor down!' In a few minutes de dochter come his house oudt, und goes over to de big house, und in a few minutes two more docthors come, und lots of beeples come de house oudt und say dot Mischter Parnes ish dedt—fell down on de floor mit heart disease, und den I come home, dots all!"

During the hunchback's disjointed recital of his early morning experience, the thin yellow face of Amos the Fox underwent many peculiar changes of expression: from that of quiet confidence and unconcern, to one of apprehension, then fear, and then remorse; and his little keen gray eyes were simply two glittering interrogation points, wavering across the face of the decrepit little hunchback. During the recital, also, Jacob and the Fox frequently exchanged significant nods and glances, and when the hunchback had concluded his story, Jacob turned to him and said:

"Vell dat ish all righdt Mose, of course ye couldn't plack his shoes up if he had to go und get

dedt. Now go und open und svweep de store oudt und hang de fine suit of cloding oudt vat I puyt fon de zhenteel young vomans lascht nighdt."

As Mose went out to comply with Jacob's instructions, Martha placed the last dish of cooked food upon the table and the three, Jacob, Amos and Martha sat down before it and devoured the food in silence. Finally Jacob drew back from the table, wiped the grease from the bristling beard around his mouth with the palms of his hands and then rubbed them upon the sides of his trousers, took up his fork, and as he picked his teeth with one of the tines, said to Amos the Fox:

"Vell pard, dat vas goot morning's vork. Two thousand tollar, und you gets half, und de palance goes to de gang: Steel, Harlip und me. Dat vas goot! und now Steel shall get away mit de kid, Harlip Brown shall get away mit ole Humble, und I shall get away mit Sam Slick, und ve shall get two thousand tollar for each job, Eh?"

"That's the bargain," replied the Fox meditatively as he arose from the table and put on his hat. "And now I must go;" and without another word he opened the back door and passed out into the alleyway, while Jacob went through the bed room into the store to send Mose to breakfast.

CHAPTER X.

A MARVELOUS PHYSICAL AND MENTAL TRANSFORMATION.

As Jacob closed the door behind him, Martha paused in her work of washing the dishes and assumed a listening attitude during which she suddenly underwent a marvelous personal transformation. Gradually and in detail, like soldiers performing military evolutions, each several feature seemed to change position sufficiently to produce a radically different expression of countenance until finally their slightly Jewish cast wholly disappeared and the peculiar posture of the body, one of the most distinguishing characteristics of women of the Jewish race, also changed, and she stood erect and graceful with an expression of mingled horror and disgust upon her fair young face. She stood thus several minutes looking vacantly toward the door through which old Jacob had disappeared, and beat a tattoo with the tines of a table fork which she held in her right hand. She was evidently engaged in self communion, and it was also evident that her thoughts were not at all pleasant. At length her meditations found voice, not in the broken English dialect of

old Jacob, with its peculiar twang of pronunciation, but in plain and vigorous American-English.

"Murder, too!" she said, "and a sneaking cowardly murder at that! and three more souls to travel the same road—it is simply horrible! I am not much good myself, and very much wicked, but this wretched cold-blooded murder makes my heart sick! I can endure a burglar—even a common sneak-thief in a sort of a way, but a murderer, Ugh! The very thought of one makes the chills run all over my body! Why did I ever come here? Why did I not remain in that old crockery hogshead in the cellar of the abandoned building on Commercial Alley and die of starvation and malarial fever, or be devoured by wharf rats? But life is sweet, even to a homeless wretch such as I was, and so I became the servant of a miserable old Jew, and the nurse of his filthy, vile old wife, rather than die! But it would have been far better for me to have died when Jacob found me, in my nest of damp straw in the old cellar, ten years ago. Ten years of constant association with old Jacob and Leah—ten long years of thinking their thoughts and aping their manners, and hearing only their wretched dialect, has almost transformed me into one of their class; why, I think and talk and act like them unconsciously when in their presence, and when away from them the recollection of their influence over me is like the remembrance of a horrible dream!"

A sharp clicking of the latch, and the door between the kitchen and the sleeping room of old Jacob and Leah swung slowly backward upon its rusty hinges with a creaking sound, swung a little way, stopped, then wide open and Hunchback Mose came ambling through the opening, silently sat down in a chair by the table and without ceremony began ravenously to devour the scant supply of remnants of food left by the others. The creature gnawed the bones like a half-famished dog and in his eagerness clawed the food into his mouth with his long dirt-begrimmed ape-like fingers. Martha stood looking down pityingly several minutes upon the pinched saffron-colored face of the misshapen creature, and then said to him in a kind tone, but with evident feelings of aversion, adopting again the accustomed dialect:

“You vas hungry, Mose?”

“Yaw,” he answered as he gnawed a piece of gristle from the end of a bone, “yaw, I vas hungry now, und vas always hungry!”

“Too bad,” she muttered, “too bad! It is a crime to treat any human that way!” Stooping down she opened the oven door of the cook stove, drew forth a large tin plate heaping full of fried potatoes and pieces of meat, and placed it on the table before the hunchback saying:

“There Mose, chaw away at dat, und fill your stomach for vonce!”

"Vat, Martha! vas all dat for me?" he asked with hands uplifted in astonishment.

"Yaw," she replied with a pitying smile, yaw Mose, dat ish all for you, chaw it all down und fill your stomach, I save it for you."

"You vas goot to me Martha, always," he said with quivering voice, "und I pays you pack soom days ven you may need a frendt."

"Vell dat ish all right," she replied as she began again to wash the dishes. "I vas poor und hungry myself vonce."

"Yaw dat ish so. How long since you come to live mit Yacob? I forget."

"It vas den year."

"Yaw, yaw, und I vas a kid den, und lib mit ole Mother Levy down in Carondelet. Und Yacob goes aroun' den mit an ole horse un vagon und buys ole rags und iron, und he found you in a cellar vere he vent to schdeal some lead bipe, aindt it?"

"Yaw," she answered gloomily.

"Und he dakes you home do his rag house vere he lib mit his ole frow, Leah—Eh?"

"Yaw, dat ish so."

"Und how ole vas you den?"

"Dwelve year oldt."

"Den you vas dwenty-doo now?"

"Yaw."

"Und vas so sweedt und breety! Vy you stay mit ole Yacob and Leah ven you could be de

frow of a young and handsome man, who vood love you? You vas awful sweetd und goot."

Martha colored slightly, and in silence continued to wash the dishes, but with increased energy.

"Und vat ish your dthru name?" persisted Mose as he deposited a large piece of meat between his jaws and began to chew it vigorously.

"My given name vas Valentina," she replied slowly and hesitatingly, drawing from her bosom a tiny gold locket on which was engraved: "Valentina from Mary." "I vas porn on Saint Valentine's day and they name me after de day."

"Who give you de locket?"

"A vomans mit who I lived before I became a gutter urchin. She died, poor thing!"

"Und vat vas your udder name?"

"I don't know, Mose; but vy you ask me so many questions?"

"I vont to know all about you," he replied laying down his knife and fork and rising from the table, having devoured the last crumb. "I come here five year ago ven Yacob go into de ole cloding pisness, und I find you here und Yacob say you ish a Jew orphan; but I know you ish no Jew, und you dreats me goot, und Yacob dreats me mean, und so I likes you und hates Yacob, dat ish all."

"Vell dat ish all rightd," replied Martha soothingly, "Now run along into de store or Yacob gets mad und vip you."

"Yaw, yaw," replied the hunchback with a vengeful expression on his withered face, "Yaw, but I gets even mit him zoom dimes if I live. Good-py breety Valentina," and he shuffled out of the room bowing and grinning like a trained ape.

CHAPTER XI.

GHOSTS OF PAST EVENTS.

As the hunchback closed the door behind him the peculiar Jewish expression again vanished from Martha's face giving place to one of dreamy meditation, and as she stood there slowly wiping the dishes that she had washed she was fair, indeed very fair, even beautiful. She was of medium height, with form almost perfect in every detail, full and plump even to voluptuousness. Her features were regular and extremely delicate, with mouth, nose and chin quite perfect; large expressive brown eyes shaded by full handsome eyebrows and long dark eyelashes. Her head was large and symmetrical and crowned with an abundance of dark silken chestnut hair, and her complexion was of the warm glowing tint of the inhabitants of tropical countries. Her voice was soft and flute-like, the very echoes of harmonious vocal music, and her every movement was graceful, the very "poetry of motion." The hunchback's blunt boorish inquiries had directed her mind into new channels of thought, and she was trying to resuscitate her almost dead remembrances of early childhood.

Dimly there remained impressed upon her mind the image of a fair young mother's face with a grieved expression about its beautiful mouth and sad tearful eyes; she could feel the delicate pressure of loving arms around her and faintly hear the soft sweet notes of a lullaby. And upon her mind was another image plainly impressed: that of a cold-faced angry eyed man, and also faintly in her ears echoed a harsh reproachful voice, and an old feeling of abject terror came back to her heart. Upon her mind also was mentally photographed a great house of rough stone with a tall tower at one corner, and many irregular angles and gables, and with wide halls and many large rooms within. And another image floated across the image of her mind: that of a tall old woman with thin white hair and withered form and wrinkled face, with cold, gray, blood-shot eyes, bulging out painfully from their sockets, and with long black teeth protruding from between thin ashen, shriveled lips. And still another woman's face cold, wrinkled and threatening went flitting by.

Then came a throng of incidents, ghosts of the dead past, trooping one by one through the dimly lighted galleries of the temple of her mind. First, the sensation of being carried in arms a long distance at night in a freezing atmosphere through a blinding snowstorm, of the bearer sinking down and vainly endeavoring to rise, of the pitiful sounds of a praying voice and sighs and weeping, and then a long pe-

riod of silence broken only by the moaning of the winds. And then the sensation of being lifted from the earth and borne away in arms, and then the warmth of a fire and the cheer and comfort of a human habitation, and then—oblivion.

Then again there passed before the mirror of her mind, vague and shadowy forms and scenes, such as may leave a faint impress upon a partially demented brain in early childhood through a series of years, and then a gradual unfolding of the mind and corresponding improvement in the power of comprehension; and then a vivid recollection of the miseries of a homeless vagabond life, of drifting around the streets and alleyways of the city with only an equally homeless and friendless young bulldog as companion and protector; of struggling with dogs in the gutters for the possession of stray morsels of food; of a period of business adventure in the sale of newspapers and matches upon the streets and finally of an attack of sewer fever and the faithfulness of her dog companion in guarding her against the attacks of wharf rats in her bed of straw in the deserted cellar, and finally in directing old Jacob Blum to her rescue.

Up to that period of her life she remembered distinctly but one human face, that of a boy—a handsome, brave, stout fellow, like herself a homeless wanderer—a bootblack by occupation—who had often defended her against a host of wild gutter ur-

chins; who had supplied her with clothing, purchased with his scant earnings, from old clothes dealers, and as often himself gone hungry in consequence. That face was indelibly stamped upon her mind and heart, and every day of her life—even every hour—by a slight effort of will she resurrected it from the cold ashes of the dead years and passed it in review before her mental vision, and joyed in loving it to the utmost fullness.

Light quick footsteps along the brick pavement of the alleyway broke rudely in upon her meditations, and stepping quickly to the door she opened it and looked out. One glance at the face of the handsome, elegantly dressed man passing along the alleyway, and her heart gave a violent throb and then seemed to cease its motion. The delicate rose-tint of nature vanished from her cheeks and lips leaving them as white as marble. He heard the door open, paused, glanced upward at the fair form and face in the doorway, started, took a step toward her, hesitated an instant and then in evident confusion of mind turned and walked quickly away. A few moments later he turned into a wide and handsome business street, paused, took out his watch, glanced at the dial and said reflectively: "Seven o'clock, time is up, and Sam Slick always keeps his appointments promptly. Three squares yet and old Miserleigh waiting!" and he hurried along the street at a very fast walking, muttering: "So like little Valentina! Just

as she would have looked grown up. But no, it cannot be, she has been dead ten years, poor little dear, and long since crumbled into dust."

As Martha stood in the kitchen doorway, speechless and spellbound, looking in the direction in which that familiar face had vanished, she was a perfect model for a statue. Her posture was graceful and elegant, and eloquently expressive of deep and thrilling emotion. Her left hand was pressed against her bosom just over her heart as though to check its wild pulsations, and her right arm was extended partially in a beckoning manner, and partially as in the act of enfolding some object within her embrace. Her large brown eyes sparkled with an expression of intense joy and her form quivered as though under the influence of an electric current. As she stood thus, utterly deprived of the power of motion, an immense bull-dog crept out of his kennel in the back yard, pushed open the gate, and went bounding out into the alleyway, began smelling along the pavement over which Sam Slick had walked but a few moments before, and in low whining tones gave vent to almost human expressions of delight, during which Martha, having partially recovered from the shock of surprise, sank down in a chair and watched the dog with breathless interest. Finally the sagacious animal glanced upward and discovered his young mistress sitting in the doorway and bounded toward her with profuse manifestations

of delight. At the foot of the flight of three steps leading up from the pavement of the alleyway to the kitchen door, he squatted down on his haunches and elevating his nose gazed upward into his mistress' face with an expression of almost human intelligence, a mute but plain inquiry and an answer combined, that is: "Don't you know him? Yes you do, and so do I!"

"Who is it? dear old Hero, who is it?" asked Martha in soft tremulous tones looking lovingly down into the eyes of her faithful canine friend. "Paul Dyke, whom we thought long since dead? Is it Paul, Hero, is it Paul?"

The human eyes of the animal assumed an expression of intelligent comprehension which language cannot describe, as he bowed his head and gave vent to a low winding bark which sounded very much like a human voice saying: "Yes, Valentina, it is Paul!"

Joyfully she held out her hands toward the dog who instantly bounded up the steps to her feet, and she sank down upon her knees and clasped her arms around his neck and laid her cheek upon his head and wept, while Hero whined in a caressing voice as though endeavoring to talk.

CHAPTER XII.

THE "THREE GRACES OF SATAN."

William Barnes had been afflicted with heart disease for several years and from the first manifestations of the dread malady he had been under constant medical treatment by Dr. Hedges, the physician first called by the servant who heard his master fall upon the floor and hurried into his room to find him prone upon his back, apparently lifeless. Therefore when Dr. Hedges examined the body which had been placed upon the bed and discovered all the outward indications of death from heart disease, he simply stated the facts to the other physicians who had been summoned, and after a casual view of the body by them a post-mortem examination was deemed unnecessary, and was consequently dispensed with in deference to the well known aversion of the deceased to such proceeding and therefore all that remained to be done by the doctors was to prepare a certificate setting forth the cause of death, and to summon an undertaker to prepare the body for burial, and that matter having been duly attended to, the physicians took their leave. During the forenoon the undertakers accomplished their sad duties, and

by direction of Judge Prye who for many years had been the trusted friend and legal counselor, attorney and general business representative of the deceased, the body was conveyed in a handsome casket down stairs into the front parlor where hundreds of people came during the day and evening to look for the last time upon the face of him who had ever been a generous friend of the poor, and an honorable and useful citizen.

Among the first callers at the Barnes residence during the morning of the day following that of the death of its owner, were Mrs. Sly, Becky Falser and Jerusha Snuffer. They had assembled at the lodgings of Mrs. Sly as per previous arrangement, and went together therefrom, chattering in coarse tones the gossip of the neighborhood concerning the life and character of the deceased, Mrs. Sly, as usual, leading in the conversation and skillfully supplying subjects for conversation.

"Jist as I said last night," remarked Mrs. Sly to the others, as they walked slowly along the street, "Jist as I said when that old hussy Mistress O'Keefe pounded on the wall and spiled our talk. It'll be a funeral wi'out mourners. People will go to look at the corpse jist to see how it looks, and to git the latest news right on the spot, but nobody's goin' to cry 'cept the ole'oman, his housekeeper and the servants, who are sorry only because they're out of a job. He was a pizen old wretch and only give to

the poor to git his name up. Yes, there'll be no mourners, not a single blood relation at his funeral, for they do say that the young dandy what he claimed as his nephew can't be found nowhere, and I hear that some people think that there may be something crooked about the old man's death, and that the young feller may have helped him to 'shuffle off his moral pile' as the feller said in the theatre the other night, meanin', that he helped him to 'kick tne bucket,' or as the gamblers say, 'pass in his checks.' You know what I mean, I don't like to speak it, for it makes the cold chills run up and down my back to say that ugly word—ugh!"

"Ye mean," squeaked Becky Falser, "that people think that William Barnes was murdered and that young Langdon is the feller that had it done?"

"Aye," responded Mrs. Sly with a shiver, "aye, that's what I intended to say, I hearn Sol. Miserleigh hintin' that way to a fishwoman as he was buyin' some fish to be sent home."

"Law sakes alive!" chimed in Jerusha Snuffer, "how shockin! To think that his own blood kin would even wish to have him put out of the way—ah, its dreadful! dreadful to meditate on! They do say that there is a good deal of doubt in some people's minds about the young feller a bein' any relation at all of old Barnes. I was a talkin' with ole Mother Hurt this mornin' afore breakfast about it, and she says that she has knowed the Barnes family nigh

onto forty year, and that William Barnes never had a sister, and only one brother who died more'n twenty year ago and was never married and had no children than nobody knows on. She says that old Barnes got the kid somewhar before it had turned white and tried to find another one which somebody had stole, an' now he calls this un which he brought up on a bottle, his nephew—Pshaw!"

"For my part," said Mrs. Sly, in a half whisper and with a scornful toss of her head, as she opened the iron gate in front of the Barnes residence, "for my part, I think that this young scamp and the lost kid also are only old Barnes' love children—hark! there's a big crowd here already," and they ascended the flight of marble steps and a few moments later stood in the solemn presence of the dead.

"How nateral he looks," said Becky Falser as stood at the head of the casket and looked down upon the still form.

"And the red spots on his cheeks!" whispered Jerusha Snuffer, hysterically.

"And his eyes closed jist as in sleep, not the least sunken," said Mrs. Sly in a low tone; looks jist like he was breathin';" and then the idle venomous gossips stepped backward to give place to the in-flowing tide of true heartfelt mourners, among whom were Mrs. O'Keefe and her two sons, all very plainly but neatly dressed, apparently for the occasion. As that good woman stood looking down upon the dead

face of her kind benefactor, her usual calmness and self-control deserted her, and she broke forth in a low plaintive wail of sorrow, while tears gushed from her almost sightless eyes and coursed down her face.

"Come, mither dear, come away!" said Mick in a kind and gentle tone, as he laid his hand lovingly upon her shoulder. "He is dead, mither, rist his soul, and weepin' cannot bring him back to life.

"Yis, Mickey dear, I know, I know, but he was a good friend t' us an' all th' poor, but he cannot come back to us, he cannot come back to bless and cheer an' comfort us as in days gone by. Good bye dear friend, good bye," and she stooped and kissed the cold dead face and was quietly led away to her home.

"What an 'ole hypocrite!" said Mrs. Sly spitefully as the three gossips followed the O'Keefe family along the street at a distance.

"Aye, aye," replied Becky Falser sneeringly, "quite emotional—quite!"

"They do say that the ole 'oman was rather too intimate wi' old Barnes in all decency an' virtue," squeaked Jerusha Snuffer, elevating her long slim nose and snorting like a racer on the home stretch of a last heat. And so the gossips gave vent to vile slander, each endeavoring to outdo the other, until at the doorway of Mrs. Sly they parted, and each sought her own home to ponder over the events

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of the day, and to invent new tales to be scattered abroad in defamation of the pure and honorable soul, that had so suddenly flitted away from its earthly habitation, to a new life of glorious immortality.

CHAPTER XIII.

AURELIA'S STARTLING ACCUSATIONS.

While these events were transpiring at and in the vicinity of the Barnes residence, Sol. Miserleigh in his office with windows closely curtained and doors locked and bolted, sat by his desk earnestly engaged in endeavoring to obliterate writing by the application of chemicals. He had been thus employed since early morning, but his work thus far had been merely experimental, and evidently far from satisfactory. The chemicals employed, a mixture of chloride of lime and water, settled and filtered, to which was added about one-eighth part of ascetic acid, forming a white transparent liquid was applied with a fine camel's hair pencil brush to some writing on a sheet of white paper, and almost instantly the writing disappeared; but traces of the action of the solution were plainly visible upon the enamel of the paper, and Miserleigh was endeavoring to repolish it with the oval end of an ivory handled ink eraser.

Finally he sat still a few moments looking down upon the paper on the desk, and said reflectively: "After the solution has erased the writing, I must remove the solution and let the paper get perfectly dry,

and, then spread evenly over the tarnished surface, some pulverized and clarified resin (I have some here in the desk), and then polish evenly."

Then he applied a small quantity of the solution to some writing on another part of the sheet of paper, examined it attentively with a magnifying glass, and when the writing had entirely disappeared absorbed the moisture remaining on the surface with a clean piece of blotting paper; then he dipped a tiny piece of soft silken sponge into a glass of filtered water, squeezing it out almost dry and passed it gently several times over that portion of the paper from which the writing had been erased by the chemical solution. Then he arose, went to the stove, held the damp spot on the paper to the fire until it was thoroughly dry, returned to his desk, spread a small quantity of finely powdered resin over the tarnished surface of the paper, polished it down evenly and smoothly with the oval end of the handle of the ink eraser, took the paper up in his left hand, leaned back in his chair, took the magnifying glass in his right hand, held it between his eyes and the paper, and carefully examined his work.

"Not a trace," he said excitedly, "not even a shadow of an erasure—it is simply perfect!"

As he put the paper and glass down upon the desk, his hands began to tremble, his saffron-colored face became flushed, and large bead-like drops of perspiration gathered upon his brow. He sat thus

several movements, quivering, chuckling, grinning like a very fiend, all the while rubbing his hands together nervously and swaying his body to and fro in his chair. Gradually, however, he regained his self-possession, and when perfectly calm, he reached forward and opened the secret drawer of his desk and drew forth a small slip of paper on which was written in Miserleigh's peculiar handwriting, except the signature at the bottom, the following:

\$3,000.00

"St. Louis, Nov. 3d, 18—.

Twelve months after date, I promise to pay to the order of Sol. Miserleigh, Three Thousand Dollars, with interest at the rate of six per cent per annum, Value received.

William Barnes."

"And now," said Miserleigh tremulously, laying down the promissory note upon his desk: "now comes 'the tug of war.' I may not be as successful with the real work as I have been with the experiment. If I fail I simply lose three thousand dollars as this is the only evidence in existence of his indebtedness to me. If I succeed, I gain at one swoop a twenty seven thousand slice of the Barnes estate. It is worth the trial—it is worth the hazard! With quick decisive movements, he smoothed down the note upon the desk, and applied the chemical solution to the word "three" in the body of the note, and excitedly watched the effect through the magnifying glass. The solution did the work thoroughly and rapidly, and Miserleigh sponged and polished the ab-

raised surface as he had done during his successful experiment. The result was highly satisfactory to him, and as he laid down the magnifying glass, he said almost joyfully: "It is, if possible more perfect than the other. I have won! The change can never be detected!"

Then he proceeded to erase in like manner the dividing points between the figures in the upper left hand corner of the note and also ciphers denoting cents, leaned back in his chair and said falteringly: "Now is the supreme moment. Can I steady my nerves to write naturally? I fear not—I fear not! Oh, for one moment of absolute calmness!" and he rubbed his cold hands together, while an agonized expression came upon his face. Several minutes he sat thus, shivering with nervous ague and then with a quick movement he arose and went to a small closet in the opposite corner of the room, unlocked the door, took out a bottle labeled "Brandy" poured about two teaspoonfuls into a small graduating glass, added a little water, drank it, smacked his lips and said:

"Not too much! not too much! although I am sorely tempted to take more. I could drink the whole of it and still not feel satisfied! I love liquor better than anything else on earth, and even a slight taste of it drives me almost mad from thirst for the accursed liquid of hell! But I have work to do now, fine steady work, so back you go into your

hiding place," and he returned the bottle and glass to the closet, locked the door, returned to his desk, sat down in the chair, took up the pen, dipped it carefully into the ink, and with steady hand wrote "Thirty" where the word "Three" had formerly appeared in the body of the note. A few skillful dashes of the pen which added two dots, a cipher and the fractional marks denoting cents to the figures in the upper left hand corner, and the work was finished.

"That will do" he said quietly, as he returned the magnifying glass and note to the secret drawer in his desk and carefully closed it. "It is well executed and the alteration cannot be detected!" Then he arose, locked his desk, put on his overcoat and hat, unbolted the front door of his office, stepped out upon the pavement, closed and carefully locked the door, and then walked quickly away. A brisk walk of half an hour brought him in the vicinity of the Barnes mansion which was only about eight squares distant from his own residence and glancing at his watch he observed that it lacked only about three quarters of an hour of the time appointed for the funeral cortege to start from the residence to the cemetery. As he returned the watch to his pocket and started forward, he saw Joshua Humble enter the mansion in company with Judge Prye and the two evidently in close conversation, and instantly his guilty conscience smote him with the scorpion lash

of dire forebodings of impending disaster, and his first impulse was to turn and flee with all possible speed from the awful presence of a just and pitiless avenger.

A moment only did Miserleigh hesitate and then his better judgment overcame his fears, and with a low, light laugh he muttered as he again moved forward: "Met merely by accident—it signifies nothing. Humble dare not betray me! He is my dog and wears my collar. I have his head upon the block and hold the ax in readiness to decapitate him the moment that he betrays the slightest evidence of insubordination or treachery!"

Pressing his way through the silent throng of sad-faced people, upon the pavement, upon the steps, and within the spacious hallway of the mansion and into the parlor where William Barnes lay still and cold in death, Sol Miserleigh paused beside the casket and glanced timidly down upon the face of his victim. As he stood in that awful presence, looking down upon that calm, cold face, the dead eyes seemed to open and the lips seemed to move and the familiar voice of William Barnes in a faint whisper echoed in his ears the terrible words: "Slanderer! Forger!! Murderer!!!" and he cowered backward through the throng of mourning people toward the open doorway. After several frantic but ineffectual efforts to escape from the building, he paused amid a throng of factory operatives, among

whom were Mrs. O'Keefe and her two stalwart sons, and the chief gossips of the neighborhood, the Sly, Snuffer and Falser women, the Three Graces of Satan—Falsehood, Hypocrisy and Slander.

In his eagerness to escape from the mute accusing presence of the dead, Sol Miserleigh had not noticed the commotion amid the throng of people around the casket at the further end of the room, but as he paused and wiped the cold perspiration from his face, a woman's voice in soft, sad, sweet tones echoed through the room, and with a startled horrified expression upon his face, which instantly changed from its sickly saffron to a deathly ashen hue, he clasped his hands together in an attitude expressive of despair and exclaimed in a low frightened tone:

"My God! Aurelia!"

"I have come to see," said mad Aurelia, "if this is indeed my William, my husband, who lies here dead. My brother Sol said last night, that William Barnes, my husband was dead, but I could not believe it, for he was so young and strong, so full of warm, rich blood and of buoyant, joyous life, that even the Angel of Death would pause and weep to see him die. No, he is not dead, for only two nights ago we sat together in the deep shadow of the myrtle upon the rustic seat on the lawn at my home, and whispered to each other sweet confidences with many precious words of endearment, coupled with

vows of eternal constancy; and the stars twinkled and winked their pleased approval of our lovemaking, and the zephyrs joyfully fluttered the soft green leaves above our heads; and the moonlight came glimmering down between the swaying branches and joyfully danced in golden circles upon the soft green sward beneath our feet. We had been married months before, but Mother and Sol did not know it, and we kept the sweet secret between us, because they were opposed to our marriage and I was not quite of age. But yesterday was my birthday, my glorious day of emancipation, and my husband was to have come and taken me to his home, and we were to have had a grand wedding and a joyous remarriage, but he did not come, for Brother Sol—”

By a tremendous effort Sol Miserleigh had forced his way through the crowd and grasping Aurelia rudely by the shoulder, he said to her in a husky tremulous voice: “Hush Aurelia! Be quiet! Stop talking!” Then addressing the people, awed into painful silence by the sad revelations of mad Aurelia, he said:

“Good people, this is my insane sister. Her mind is a total wreck; she is wholly irresponsible and her words are but the weird imaginations of a mind wholly diseased. I beg you to make way that I may remove her from the house.”

“Not yet, not yet!” said mad Aurelia dreamily,

"no, not yet! I must first see who it is that lies dead here," and she pushed his hand from her shoulder with considerable violence, approached the head of the casket, and looked down upon the face of the dead.

"Why! Why!" she said in a tone of intense relief accompanied by a low hysterical laugh, "why this is an old man! At least middle-aged! See his gray hairs and the wrinkles on his forehead and cheeks! My husband is young and beautiful and much smaller than this corpse, and yet it looks like my William grown old. Ah, it must be the corpse of his father! Why, I remember now, he was murdered down by the lake over yonder! Yes, yes, this is the body of William's father!"

"Come," said Sol. Miserleigh, in a tone which sounded like a wail of agony, and again placing his hand upon her shoulder, even more rudely than before, "Come, Aurelia, let us go home!"

"Yes, Sol," she answered writhing with pain under his grasp. "Yes, Brother, I will go now for I am satisfied. But why did you say that my husband is dead, when you knew it to be false? and so I came here only to look upon the face of his father whom you murdered. But it is just like you to talk that way simply to grieve me. Ah you are a heartless, cruel brother, always plotting—plotting, and you never pray. Ah! I remember now why my husband did not come yesterday to take me to our

beautiful home! Was it yesterday? It seems much longer ago than that; now that I think of it, it seems like an age—an eternity of years of anguish!"

"Come!" repeated Miserleigh fiercely, grasping her by both arms behind and rudely endeavoring to push her through the crowd toward the main entrance; but again she shook herself free from his grasp, and facing him said in a defiant tone as her eyes flashed indignantly:

"Yes, I will go Sol but first, here before all these people I want to know why you poisoned my husband's mind against me by impeaching my chastity, and then why did you permit the demons to carry away my children, my beautiful twins, and William's children also, half mine, half his—to steal them from my arms while I slept last night; why did you wrong me so? cold, cruel, heartless brother!"

Sol Miserleigh again laid his hand upon her shoulder, but Judge Prye stepped hastily to his side and said in a cold stern tone of command: "Take your hand from her shoulder Miserleigh! I will conduct her from the house. You will go with me madam?" he added gently, addressing Aurelia.

"Oh, yes," she replied with child-like simplicity, "yes, I will go with you, for you have a kind, good face and will conduct me safely to my home;" and she followed him quietly out of the mansion, and was placed in a carriage, and accompanied by Sol Miserleigh and Judge Prye was driven rapidly away.

"What does this mean, Miserleigh?" asked Judge Prye sternly as the carriage dashed swiftly along the street.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing! She is hopelessly insane," was the hesitating reply in a feeble voice.

"I am not as crazy as you think, Sol," said Aurelia, angrily, and then addressing Judge Prye in a sofe beseeching tone she said: "Good friend, will you kindly see my husband, William Barnes, and tell him that I am and always have been good and pure, and that I fondly love him, and that I go every day and every night and kiss the ground where his feet once trod, and kiss the seat where he last sat by my side out on the lawn beneath the myrtle?"

"Yes, if you do not first see him, Aurelia, I will meet him 'when this mortal shall put on immortality' and I will faithfully deliver your message," replied Judge Prye feelingly.

At that moment the carriage halted at the front gate of the Miserleigh residence and Sol assisted Aurelia to alight and as she sauntered dreamily away up the paved walk toward the front entrance, Judge Prye said to Sol Miserleigh:

"As you doubtless know, I have been William Barnes' attorney and general business representative for many years. It therefore becomes my duty to investigate the matters of which your sister talks in a manner so rationally. That is all I wish to say now, and I bid you good day."

Then the carriage was rapidly driven to the Barnes residence where Judge Prye found the casket already in the hearse and the cortege ready to start. An hour later the procession entered the cemetery, the casket was lifted from the hearse and placed over the open grave. Then the beautiful Episcopal burial service was read, a brief eloquent prayer was uttered, and all that remained in this world of William Barnes was lowered into the bosom of "mother earth" and covered up forever from mortal sight.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONFIDENCE MAN'S VIRTUOUS RESOLUTION.

"What was it that Joshua Humble said to you?" was the pointed and abruptly inquiry of Samuel Slick of George Langdon as the carriage in which they were seated rolled away from the lodgings of the latter, on the morning of the death of William Barnes, leaving Joshua Humble standing upon the pavement in an attitude of eloquent appeal.

"Oh, nothing very especial, certainly not of interest to you Mr. Slick, a mere private matter between Mr. Humble and myself," replied Langdon, coloring slightly.

"Ah, I beg pardon," continued Slick, "but you see my boy, Mr. Humble is rather inquisitive sometimes, and I did not know but he might have been saying something not very complimentary of me, for the truth is he does not feel very friendly toward me, because I am rather too flashy to correspond with his ideas of what a young man should be. On the other hand, while I do not always treat Mr. Humble with the respect and deference which his age and accomplishments ought to command, because he reprooves and snubs me when I am rudely

jovial, (for which I am not wholly responsible, because it is my nature to be so), at bottom, I esteem him very highly for he is an upright, honest, old gentleman, the very soul of honor, and I have often wondered why he remains in Miserleigh's employ and endures his abuse, and grinds himself down under the hardest and most wearisome toil for a mere pittance. Mr. Humble is a man of fine intelligence, and is cultivated and refined in the highest degree, and under favorable circumstances might have become one of the foremost men of the city. But somehow, long ago, Miserleigh got a grip on him, and so to speak, has been slowly strangling him to death. I have heard that the residence in which Miserleigh now lives, once belonged to Mr. Humble, and by some hook or crook (probably by a very crooked crook) Miserleigh hooked him out of it, and crooked himself into it, and in the process of hooking and crooking, Mr. Humble not only lost his home and his entire fortune, which Miserleigh absorbed as quickly and easily as a sponge takes up water, but also lost his personal liberty, and ever since has been Miserleigh's slave in all but name."

"It was the common gossip on the streets twenty years ago, when I was a gutter urchin, blacking boots and sellings newspapers, that Joshua Humble, the ex-stockbroker, had become Miserleigh's dog and wore his collar. Why, Miserleigh is merely Humble's successor in business, except the money lending

part of it which Miserleigh added and which is in fact the source of the largest profits of his business. He loans small amounts to impecunious people at the rate of from seventy-five to one hundred per cent per annum, secured by mortgage on personal property, such as household effects; and many a poor family he has left without even a bed to sleep on or a stove in which to build a fire, in mid-winter. Humble was a stockbroker twenty-five years ago, and occupied the same office where Miserleigh now holds forth; and somehow Miserleigh got a twist on him in a business way, in the stock market I presume, and in a financial sense twisted the very life out of him, and not only so, but he got some other twist on him, something involving Humble's personal honor and integrity. For fifteen years I have been trying to find out what it is, and have never been able to discover the slightest clew to it until yesterday, and then by the merest accident."

"You interest me very much, for what you have said concerning Mr. Miserleigh and Mr. Humble is all news to me," said Langdon. "I have known both gentleman all my life. Mr. Miserleigh, simply by sight and reputation and Mr. Humble quite intimately, and I esteem him very highly, while on the other hand I have always feared Mr. Miserleigh. I have always regarded him as a very cold, calculating, selfish man quick to take advantage of and to profit by another's misfortunes, but I did not even dream that he would

come down to the level of a common robber as he seems to have done in his dealings with Mr. Humble."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the carriage at the railway depot, and ten minutes later they were seated in the train traveling eastward at the rate of thirty miles an hour. As they journeyed, they were both ill at ease, especially Sam Slick who paced the aisle of the car almost constantly, went out on the platform at every station and promenaded the entire length of the train even into the baggage car. He bought candy and fruit of the news agent, and gave it to some dirty and ragged emigrant children in the smoker; scraped acquaintance with a long nosed, pockmarked widow in weeds in the ladies' coach and joked with and flattered her for amusement, but finally tiring of her foolish simpering, he went again into the smoker and exchanged anecdotes with the jolly news agent and finally dropped into a conversation with a grizzled old granger with manure on his boots and hayseed on his clothing and in his hair and beard, concerning the cultivation of turnips and potatoes and the breeding and raising of hogs.

Again, becoming weary of his ineffectual efforts to "kill time" and divert his mind from some disagreeable subject, he returned to the coach where he found young Langdon poring over a newspaper

and turning its pages nervously, evidently not reading understandingly.

After exchanging a few commonplace remarks with Langdon he passed on into the smoking compartment, sat down, lighted a cigar and gave way to a train of reflections from which he had been vainly endeavoring to escape. These were his thoughts:

"I have known this boy only about three years and yet when I look upon his face, it is strangely familiar, and it seems to me that I must have known him in his early childhood—at least he bears a strong resemblance to someone whom I have known intimately when I was a gutter urchin. He is the exact counterpart of—of—who on earth does he so strikingly resemble? I cannot remember and yet I ought to recollect easily, for whoever it was, was very near and dear to me—ah, Great God! how could I have forgotten her? George Langdon is the exact image of my poor lost Valentina!"

"Now I understand why I have never been able to look upon that boy's innocent and honest face without experiencing a thrill of pleasure—an almost irresistible desire to be near him. I have resolutely fought down that impulse, and have almost hated myself for indulging in it even for a moment. However, the explanation is easy now, and I am glad to have at last unraveled the mystery."

"And Sol Miserleigh has charged me with the task of corrupting his young soul; of plunging him

into a vortex of debauchery and crime; of robbing him of his fortune and casting him adrift upon the world a hopeless human wreck! Merciful saints! The very thought is a monstrous crime! The very Devil himself would violate his contract with Miserleigh if brought to such a test, and bad as I am, I am neither a burglar, a common thief nor a murderer, and I will not be a party to the commission of all these crimes in one, and especially upon an innocent and defenceless boy whom I cannot but love!"

"It is fortunate," he thought almost aloud, that I preserved these written instructions of Sol Miserleigh, for with this as unimpeachable evidence of his criminal proceedings in this matter, in my possession, I have him wholly within my power if he dares to indulge in any retaliation upon me for my failure to carry out his scheme of robbery, debauchery and ruin against this boy."

At this juncture the train stopped at the dinner station and throwing out of the window a cigar which he had just lighted, he went to where Langdon was seated, and arm in arm they walked out to dine, chatting pleasantly together, Slick putting forth his best efforts to please and amuse his companion.

CHAPTER XV.

SAD MEDITATIONS OF TWO TRAVELERS.

The afternoon was dreary and uneventful to the travelers, being an exact counterpart of their experience of the forenoon after their departure from St. Louis, each endeavoring to amuse himself independently of the other, and each failing in the attempt most miserably. And so the time, in languid spiritless flight passed wearily on from hour to hour, and the train went grinding along the rails of steel with many moanings and complainings like human distressful voices, and rain splashed threateningly upon the windows, and poured in sheets from the roofs of the cars, and dead leaves fell in showers from the trees as snowflakes fall upon the earth in mid-winter; and the dying grass on the meadows drooped lower, and the cold wind whistled and moaned, and all nature seemed to be sinking down into the dread vortex of death.

To Langdon, it seemed as though the day would never end, and a sad, sickening sensation crept into his heart as he gazed at the dreary landscape through the falling raindrops and listened to the grinding of the wheels of the cars, and his thought went sadly

backward to his dear home and to the kind old man whom he called uncle, and he experienced many pangs of regret because of the foolish and to him, heinous act of sin and folly which had brought him to his deplorable condition—that of a fugitive from Justice—and his tender sensitive young heart was overwhelmed with emotion and he covered his face with his hands to hide the hot tears which gushed from his eyes and flowed down his face.

As he sat there weeping silently, utterly oblivious to all that was passing around him, he did not hear the footfall of Sam Slick upon the velvet carpet of the aisle of the car, nor did he see that usually rollicking individual as he paused by his side and looked down upon him with mournful pitying eyes. A moment only did that person pause, and then he passed on to the smoking compartment of which he was the sole occupant at that time, sat down, lighted a cigar and began again to commune with his own thoughts, puffing paerly clouds of smoke from his lips, which arose above his head and floated away in waves and circles.

“I cannot remain in the presence of that boy and continue to be Sam Slick,” he said to himself in a half whisper. “When he is near me I am Paul Dyke of old—the bootblack and newsboy with a good name and a pure heart, ere the light went out from the beautiful eyes of dear little Valentina and left me groping in sin and despair. But I am not

yet wholly depraved, for there is a pure and tender spot in my heart, in which is enshrined the image of my beautiful darling, and whatever there is of good in me may be wholly attributed to the influence of her presence there. The question has often come to my mind, 'What do I live for?' and then it has gone flitting away leaving in its place only the sad answer, 'I know not.' But now the question comes to me again emphasized a thousand fold and the answer comes to my soul in trumpet tones, 'to guard that boy from the awful perils of youth, and to guide him in the way of truth, purity and honor!'"

"From this moment I begin a new life and I put the old behind me forever. Oh, spirit of my beautiful, dead Valentina! have you returned to earth in the person of this good boy, to exercise the power and charm of your pure and loving presence to draw me away from the awful whirlpool of sin and moral degradation, in which I have been helplessly drifting since I came within the accursed influence of Sol Miserleigh? Why, what have I been doing? Simply working schemes which he could not carry out alone because of his lack of smooth and agreeable speech and because of the positive and absolute repulsiveness of his presence. Schemes of stock speculation, plans of peculation in many lights and shades, just barely within the realm of legal safety, but morally the grossest of vulgar robbery. I have been for him during all these years since I weakly yielded

to his vile temptation, his cat's paw to pull the hot chestnuts from the fire, his all around confidence man, to seduce the unwary and inexperienced into his net to be robbed and ruined, and his stool pigeon to divert attention and bear the blame of his iniquities. And now he imagines that he has gotten me so firmly within his grasp—so hopelessly entangled within the meshes of his criminal intrigues, that I dare not break away from him."

"Well, we will see about that, Sol Miserleigh! we will see about that! and if you again attempt to work upon me your oft-repeated process of intimidation, with Joshua Humble as a brave and faithful ally, I will hold you down and press the keen sword of Justice against your throat until you will cry aloud in terror and piteously beg for mercy!"

The passing of the transfer and baggage check-man through the train warned him of their near approach to the city and throwing into the spittoon his half consumed cigar he stepped out of the smoking compartment and joined Langdon at his seat. He was much gratified to find that the young man had recovered his equanimity and cheerfulness and engaged him in light and amusing conversation until the train rolled into the Union Depot in a great city, from which they took a carriage direct to a hotel, and after supper repaired to their apartments which consisted of a parlor and two sleeping rooms, very handsomely furnished and communicating by folding

doors which had been opened, practically converting the three rooms into one elegant and spacious apartment. A fire of coal had been lighted in the grate in the parlor merely to add to its cheerfulness, for the rooms were heated by furnace and were very comfortable.

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ALLIANCE OF FRIENDSHIP.

"Well, Langdon, isn't this cozy and nice?" said Sam Slick as he sank down gracefully into an easy willow rocker and puffed away vigorously at the cigar which he had lighted but a few moments before in the hotel rotunda.

"Yes," replied Langdon dreamily, also seating himself in an easy rocker on the opposite side of the fire place and gazing steadily at the yellow blaze, as it roared and hissed up the chimney. "Yes, Mr. Slick, this is indeed delightful, but alas, it is not home!"

"Well, no," responded Slick with hesitation. "It is not home to you, but to me it is, for all places are alike in that respect. My home is wherever I chance to be—a convenient portable affair, my skin, and whether I be in America, Europe or Van Diemen's Land, like a tortoise my home is always with me."

"Ah, how sad!" responded young Langdon looking intently into his face with a grieved expression about his mouth.

Something in the tone of Langdon's voice thrilled

Sam Slick like an electric shock, and, glancing quickly into the face of the boy he caught the pathetic expression of his mouth and ejaculated in a voice of deep emotion—"My God—Valentina!"

Slick's emotional exclamation startled Langdon who hastily arose and inquired anxiously: "Why, Mr. Slick what is the matter?"

"Eh?" replied Slick in a dazed fashion. "Eh? Why — ha — ha! nothing very serious — only a couple of fleas playing leap-frog on my back — there!" Reaching around with one hand he pinched the clothing on his back vigorously, in the exact spot where the merry invaders were supposed to be at that moment. "There!" he repeated as he moved his shoulder up and down, "I think they are done for — at least I don't believe they will be able to renew the game this evening."

Slick's droll and bungling attempt to be funny impressed Langdon as exceedingly comical and he laughed heartily; but his quick perception enabled him to discern the subterfuge and aroused within him a desire to ascertain the cause of his companion's sudden and sensational emotion. Slick also laughed, but his voice sounded more like a wail of anguish than a human expression of pleasure, and his face grew white and he trembled. But Langdon was apparently unconscious of his friend's emotion, and having resumed his seat before the fire, leaned back in his chair and continued to laugh.

"'Tis a roaring farce to you, my boy," said Slick, dolefully, as he also resumed his seat and began to smoke his cigar. "'Tis very funny, to you doubtless, but to the fleas it is a bloody tragedy and to me a painful experience."

"Probably," said Langdon, "the fleas emigrated from the person of the granger with whom you were conversing on the train, about how to raise hogs. Probably you now realize that fleas are raised on hogs and you can so inform the granger when you again meet him. But why did you shriek (Valentina) in a voice so very emotional?"

The question was a poser to Slick who had leaned back languidly in his chair and with eyes elevated seemed to be intently examining an exceedingly complex figure of the fresco work of the ceiling in which Cupid was represented as endeavoring to inspire a mermaid with human impulses and passions. But Slick's silence and abstraction was only momentary—of just sufficient time for him to recover his lost wits, and then he straightened himself to an upright position in his chair and with an exceedingly comical expression upon his face he blurted out in a drawling tone:

"Eh, why did I call out Valentina? Why my boy, the scratching of the fleas playing leap-frog on my back produced identically the same sensation which I experienced when I received my first valentine from my first sweetheart!"

Again Langdon burst forth in a merry peal of laughter, and again Sam Slick settled back in his chair with an agonized expression upon his face, which he carefully shaded with his hand. While Langdon was laughing in childish glee, the soul of Sam Slick was weeping, for to him the merry voice of the light-hearted boy was a voice from the grave, the echo of sounds from lips which he had often kissed in holy reverence and pure affection — of soft warm, rosy lips long since cold in death and long since crumbled into ashes.

"Yes, she has returned to me in the person of this dear boy," he thought as he listened to the familiar, musical trill of Langdon's voice, as it ran up and down the scale in gentle undulations of sound and died away in a musical ripple. "Yes, she has returned to me thus and the good Lord has brought us together under circumstances which will unite us firmly for life in bonds of true affection, and may God help me to watch over and to guard him from dangers and from evil!"

Finally young Langdon stopped laughing and after exchanging a few commonplace remarks with Slick, said to him quite seriously:

"My dear Mr. Slick, you are certainly a very joyous soul and I feel quite sure that we will become good friends. But tell me truly, is Sam Slick your real name? I ask this question because the name seems not suited to your handsome form and face,

to your pleasant and cultivated manners—to your genial and affectionate disposition and to your noble and generous nature. I do not like the name, for it is suggestive of trickery and fraud, and I would rejoice to know that it is not yours by right, and to be able to address you by some other and more appropriate name.”

Sam Slick did not reply immediately to Langdon's blunt inquiry, but sat perfectly motionless in his chair and looked steadily into the fire. Although to a close observer, he would have seemed to be slumbering lightly, for he breathed like one who has just dropped into a gentle doze, in reality he was wide awake and his mind was in a state of intense activity. All the more interesting scenes and incidents of his checkered life passed with lightning-like rapidity before his mental vision, and in memory he lived again the life of an abandoned child in a great city; of a youth with only the education of experience of the street; of attendance at night school while he sold newspapers and blacked boots for a livelihood during the day; of his natural inclination to do right; of his pure and joyous association with Valentina, and of the respect for and confidence in him of all classes of people with whom he came in contact; of the coming of the tempter in the person of Sol Miserleigh; of his gradual descent from his high moral position, and the consequent changing of his name, in accordance with Miserleigh's sugges-

tion. All this passed through his mind in a flash, so quickly indeed that his abstraction and delay in answering was scarcely noticed by the anxious and earnest inquirer on the opposite side of the fire. All this, and then with a quick movement Sam Slick took the cigar from his mouth, blew out a cloud of white fragrant smoke, and turning toward Langdon and looking him full in the face, replied gravely as he cast the cigar into the fire.

"No, my dear boy, Sam Slick is not my correct name. It was assumed by me for business reasons at Miserleigh's suggestion soon after I became associated with him in business. Not that I have been guilty of any wrong doing, necessitating a change of name to conceal my identity, but it was simply a freak of Miserleigh's which I thought best to humor at the time, and I am now glad that I did so, as it may serve me a very good purpose in future by enabling me as far as may be to blot out the record of the past and begin life anew. My dear boy, my correct name is Paul Dyke."

With an exclamation of intense gratification Langdon hastily arose from his chair and went over to the side of his companion, placed one hand gently upon his head and the other upon his shoulder and said affectionately:

"My dear friend, I knew that that horrid name with its vile alliteration could not be your own except by adoption, and I am rejoiced to find that my

impression was absolutely correct. Dyke — Paul Dyke, that is a beautiful name, so smooth and euphonious. Dyke means a strong barrier raised to stop floods and it signifies a strong and steadfast protector. I feel that you are all that your noble name implies and I give you my confidence and affection freely and joyfully! Let us be friends and stand together if need be against the world; let us be honorable, pure and just and life will indeed be worth living. My dear friend, discard that name absolutely henceforth and be your own brave, true self. Let us both from this night live life anew and put the past behind us forever. Paul, will you join me in that high and noble resolve?"

"Yes, yes, God help me!" It was all that he could say for his heart was full and his voice was gone, and so, with a simple grasping of hands and a voiceless adieu, each retired to his own apartment to think over the many strange events of the day, and amid the darkness and silence of night to evolve new plans for the future and then, "to sleep—perchance to dream."

CHAPTER XVII.

"HAIRLIP" BROWN'S BRUTE COMPANION.

On a narrow paved street in the south-eastern portion of the city was a large building of rough limestone, consisting of two stories and a basement. It had been constructed for storage purposes and had been so used for many years, but it had subsequently been remodeled and converted into a tenement house of ten apartments of three rooms each and had been occupied by the poorest of the poor of that wretched quarter. But the owner, finding it impossible to collect his rents and becoming weary and disgusted with being compelled to eject therefrom by legal process, a dozen or more families every month, and being unable to rent the building for any other purpose, locked and boarded up the doors and windows and abandoned it altogether to wharf rats and pigeons. Eventually, however, the building and ground became the property of heirs and was sold at auction to Sol. Miserleigh for a mere pittance compared with its original cost and actual value.

To all appearances the premises were wholly unoccupied, but nevertheless there were tenants in the

three rear basement rooms, although the fact was unknown to any living soul except themselves, Sol Miserleigh and one other person. The former owner had inclosed with a tight, strong and high, board fence the entire space in the rear comprising about thirty feet in depth by the entire width of the building, so that people passing along the alleyway were unable to discover the presence of tenants and nobody would have suspicioned the fact, as the gate had been nailed up very securely with strong iron spikes after the former owner had ejected the few remaining tenants.

Apparently the building could not be entered except by violence, and yet the fact remained that the lone tenants of the basement went in and out at all times of night without experiencing the slightest difficulty, through an underground passage-way from an old cistern in the back yard, to another old cistern in the back yard of the adjoining premises on the west side, also owned by Sol. Miserleigh and occupied by Jacob Blum for the storage of old iron and rags.

The three rooms were very comfortably furnished, the two smaller as sleeping apartments, and the other immediately in the rear end of the basement for all other purposes of living. These rooms were occupied by three men, and it is but truth to say that they were villians in all which that word implies, their occupation, burglary, being pursued

as much for the satisfaction of securing by stealth that to which they had neither moral nor legal right, as for the gain which they derived therefrom. To them their occupation was a science, and each adventure contemplated was a separate problem requiring a different method of solution. Hence while they were not scientists in the common acceptation of the term, they were nevertheless very scientific in the execution of their work, which was always conducted upon the triangle plan, namely: two to guard and one to work, in imitation of the great Napoleon in his military operations.

The chief of this gang of precious rascals was Hairlip Brown, a man of powerful frame and gigantic stature, with a large head covered by a dense growth of coarse black hair, and a face of rugged prominent features covered nearly up to the eyes with a heavy, wiry black beard, which failed to hide the horrible expression of his mouth, occasioned by a cleft upper lip and jaw. His two "pals" or professional partners, Lafe Steel and Amos the Fox, were slim, light men, very strong active and courageous. It must not be inferred that because these men were ruffians they were either rough or uncouth in speech or manners, for on the contrary they were singularly polished and suave in language and deportment, for they had originally been circus men and had acquired, to the very point of perfection the elegance and fluency of speech, the gracefulness of

gesture and poise of body, which people of that profession acquire so quickly and so thoroughly.

It was late at night, or rather very early in the morning, probably about two o'clock, and the noisy turbulent crowd of human wrecks which always floated up and down that street after nightfall, had each found a resting place somewhere, and no sound broke the stillness save the occasional echo of the footsteps of a belated reveler, or the startling whir of a police rattle and its distant responses. Hairlip Brown was alone in the living room of his quarters and sat before a fire of blazing coal in a grate, and at his feet on a soft Turkish rug lay a large white savage-looking bull dog, the silent intelligent and faithful guardian of the premises. The others had gone out as usual, sigly, to reconnoitre a prospect for plunder and were not expected to return until near daylight and Brown had been reading a book explanatory of circus and gambling tricks and devices in which he had become much interested; but as the night wore away and the chickens in the neighborhood began to crow, he put down the book, leaned back in his chair and dropped into a gentle doze.

During the night, the rats, which swarmed everywhere in the building except in the three occupied rooms from which they were held in abeyance by the bull dog, had been restless and turbulent at intervals, rushing here and there, up and down, shrieking and squeaking and then relapsing into silence

and then renewing the uproar, much to the annoyance of the two occupants of the rear room in the basement, especially to the bull dog, who when the rodents became excessively demonstrative would rouse from his slumber, open his eyes, gnash his teeth savagely and growl in a fierce and threatening manner.

A long interval of quietness and the monotonous ticking of a clock on the wall which sounded like the pattering of horses feet on a race course at full speed, had served to lull to repose both man and beast, when suddenly another, and if possible more violent uproar occurred among the rats, which aroused the sleeping man who awoke with a sudden start, and disturbed the sleeping dog who sprang to his feet and snapped and snarled viciously.

"You don't like it, Brave!" said Brown to the dog in a tone of annoyance; "you don't like it, old boy, and neither do I. What do you say to cleaning 'em out? You're spoiling for a fight, I see, for your eyes are red and you look ugly. Shall we have a scrap with them — a regular jamboree, Eh?"

Brave, who had crouched upon his haunches at his master's feet looking wistfully upward into his face with an expression of wonderful brute intelligence, raised his right foot and placed it upon his master's knee, elevated and lowered his nose slightly in a motion resembling a nod, and uttered a sound between a growl and a bark which very much re-

sembled a human voice saying: "All right, old chum, sail in, I'm ready!"

"So you want to clean 'em out, Brave, do you?" inquired Brown in a tantalizing tone, "you want to clean 'em out, Eh?" and in response the dog placed his other foot upon Brown's other knee and raised himself until his nose was almost upon a level with that of his master's eyes and again uttered a peculiar growl which sounded very much like: "You bet I want to clean 'em out! You bet!"

"Well, well old boy you shall have a scrap, a regular pitched battle," said Brown, laughingly, "we'll teach that noisy fighting rabble that there is such a virtue as decency, even among rats."

The word "rats," uttered in a whirring rasping voice, aggravated Brave into a condition of great nervous excitement, and he rushed around the room smelling and snuffing along the cracks between the floor and base boards, and into the corners and under the furniture and finally stationed himself close to a spot on the floor covered with a small piece of sheet iron and fixing his gaze intently upon it stood quivering from excitement awaiting his master's order to battle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISERLEIGH'S ROOKERY.

In the mean time while the uproar of the rodents was simply deafening, Brown had risen from his chair, taken down a violin which hung on a string looped over a nail on the wall, tightened and rosined the bow and screwed the strings into tune, and then stamping his foot upon the floor to attract the attention of the rats who instantly paused in their wild orgies, doubtless anticipating an attack from some invisible enemy, he stepped over to where the dog crouched upon the floor in an attitude of assault, and removed the piece of sheet iron which worked upon a slide, disclosing a small hole which had been gnawed through the floor by rats. Then he placed a flat-bottomed chair in the center of the room, stamped again with his foot upon the floor, placed the violin against his left breast and shoulder, pressed his chin down upon it to hold it firmly in position, and with a swift graceful upward and outward movement of his right arm, he dropped the bow gently down upon the strings, and the instrument answering to the touch gave forth a sudden wail of soft, sweet harmony. Up and down the scale it ran, hither and

thither, here and there, rippling, trilling and vibrating in soft harmonious waves of sound, finally ending in a gentle quiver, and then a dashing sweep like the final blast of a bugle in battle sounding a charge; then he paused and listened while he gazed intently at the hole in the floor near which the bull dog was crouched like a panther prepared to spring upon its prey.

"Look out for Carlo and Cora, Brave, don't hurt them old boy, for we couldn't keep house without the darlings," said Brown to the dog in a low tone of admonition, and then he again placed the violin in position against his shoulder, drew the bow gently over the strings, ran up and down the scale in soft gushes of melody, and then with a few shrill piercing notes like a bugle call to "boots and saddles," and then a brief pause, he inclined his head a little more toward his left shoulder, elevated the end of the fiddle bow slightly and with a quick sweeping outward movement brought it down upon the strings of the instrument, and dashed away upon "The Devil's Dream."

The music was soft, quick, harmonious and thrilling, and its effect upon the rodents was wonderful. First, a white nose appeared within the hole in the floor, then a white head and finally out sprang a large rat with fur as soft as silk and as white as snow, quickly followed by another rat a trifle larger, and black and glistening as jet. Immediately they arose

upon their hind feet, like trained dogs with their fore paws drooping at the first joint, and began moving around in circles close together and always facing each other like plantation negroes at a hoedown.

Their gyrations, gestures and grimaces were extremely comical and Brown laughed and chuckled as they went whirling around in exact time with the music, and even the dog seemed highly amused as with ears erect and eyes fixed intently upon the hole in the floor he indulged occasionally in sidelong glances toward them, and grinned in imitation of a human smile revealing two rows of glittering sharp white teeth. The dog and the dancing rats were Brown's pets and had been trained and exhibited together by him in a side show of a circus in which he appeared as a Samson balancing heavy weights and toying with cannon balls; consequently the animals were companions and friends, and the rodents in their circlings fearlessly capered around and over the dog who diligently continued his watch without paying the slightest heed to the bobbing puppets. Now they were upon his back, now between his forepaws within six inches of his mouth, now creeping under his belly and squealing complainingly because of the scant space; now pulling away at his ears with their forepaws and then at his tail like sailors hauling in a cable on ship-board and then whirling away together upon their hind feet.

Finally, in the very midst of their revels, a loud,

shrill, screeching and scratching sound issued from the hole in the floor and the next instant a large brown rat sprang out through the opening and was caught in mid air and crushed between the vice-like jaws of Brave, and cast aside stone dead in a twinkling. Then came another rat and still others in quick succession, each sharing the fate of its predecessor, while the uproar within the hole was something terrific, those in advance evidently having become alarmed and desiring to retreat but being pushed forward to certain death by their music-charmed companions far in the rear.

All over the building there was a rushing sound of many tiny feet like the pattering of rain drops upon an iron roof. It was a swift gathering of hosts of fierce and dangerous foes to the lone inhabitants of the basement, and they came on, squirming upward through the opening in the floor like the swift rush of water through a fire hose, and the noble dog piled up the slain around him on every side and pawed them away with his feet, while with unerring precision he caught and crushed them as they leaped into the room through the opening, his red eyes gleaming fiercely and his jaws dripping with the blood of his victims. Finally, seeing that the dog was beginning to tire, Hairlip Brown began playing slower and still slower, lower and still lower in tone, until the violin gave forth a low wailing sound like the distant notes of a funeral dirge.

The effect upon the surging mass of rats in the hole underground was simply magical; instantly they ceased to issue from the opening, and those in front, imitating the sound of the violin, it was taken up in regular order by those in their rear and echoed backward along the line like soldiers repeating commands in battle, until everywhere throughout the building there was sounded a plaintive wail of sorrow and defeat.

The effect upon the two trained rats, Carlo and Cora, was quite as marked as upon their wild companions, for they instantly ceased their waltzing movements and climbed up the legs of the chair and did not cease their upward flight until they reached the shoulders of Hairlip Brown, where they crouched down trembling close to his ears and whined piteously. Then Brown with a few loud shrill notes upon his violin, like bugle blasts recalling a charging column of troops in battle, stepped down from his perch on the chair and returned his violin to its place on the wall, and then taking his pets from his shoulders he caressed and talked to them a few moments and finally placed them gently on the floor. Instantly they scampered away and down into the hole to rejoin their less favored companions, and to relate to them the thrilling incidents of the bloody fray. Then Brown carefully replaced the strip of sheet iron over the opening in the floor, and removed the slain in a basket to the back yard where

he piled them in a great heap, returned to the room, closed and bolted the door and sponged the blood from the dog's mouth and body, and after caressing and complimenting the noble animal, who gave many evidences of keen appreciation of his master's satisfaction and praise, he returned to his seat before the fire, and the dog returned to his rug, and soon amid dead silence both man and beast relapsed into profound slumber, the man dreaming of successful adventures of intrigue and robbery, and the beast of other thrilling and bloody conflicts and glorious victories.

CHAPTER XIX.

TRAPPERS OF MEN IN COUNCIL.

An hour they slept, while the little Swiss clock upon the wall ticked out the passing moments, and then, just as its hands pointed to four, there came a gentle rap on the door. Then there was a brief pause and then three raps, a pause and then a single rap, and silence. When the first rap sounded upon the door, Brave sprang to his feet and stood in a listening attitude as though counting the raps, and when the final pause came he raised his right foot and brought it down smartly upon the knee of his slumbering master. With a violent start Brown straightened up in his chair, rubbed his eyes, glanced down at the upturned face of his faithful and silent brute companion, and in an anxious tone whispered to him the inquiry: "What's the matter, Brave? what's up old boy?" In answer the dog pricked up his ears, ruffled his back until the hair stood upright in a bristling row, and looking intently toward the door he wagged his head threateningly as though in the act of rending a foe and brought his jaws together like the clash of a steel trap.

"Ah—ha! I see; somebody at the door, Eh?"

said Brown, watching the dog intently. "Who is it, Brave?"

In reply the dog settled down upon his haunches, at his master's feet, and raising his right foot tapped him upon the knee lightly in exact imitation of the knocks upon the door, and then wagging his tail vigorously he sat looking up into Brown's face with an anxious impatient expression in his eyes.

"Ah!" said Brown in a gratified tone, "all right old boy, "we'll let him in," and he arose and went to the door, and without hesitation or a word of inquiry undid the fastenings and swung it open, and Amos the Fox stepped quickly into the room, followed by Lafe Steele, Jacob Blum and Sol Miserleigh.

The surprise of Hairlip Brown at seeing so many of his companions enter at one time, accompanied by Sol Miserleigh was simply overwhelming, and with a muttered exclamation of astonishment he stepped backward several paces and raised his hands in a gesture of expressive of consternation. By special understanding between them, as a precautionary measure deemed vitally essential to their safety, never before had more than one of them entered the premises at the same time, and their presence there together seemed to portend some imminent danger. Sol Miserleigh had barely crossed the threshold when Brown pushed the door quickly shut, and with trembling hands locked and bolted it,

and turning toward the others was about to demand an explanation of the cause of their appearance collectively, when Steele placed his hand upon his shoulder and explained that they had entered the adjoining inclosure singly, and by chance had met there and consequently had applied for admittance at the same time. Then elevating his nose he began snuffing the air and looking around the room in search of the cause of the decidedly pungent odor which pervaded the atmosphere.

"Rats!" said Brown laughingly, as he observed the expression of disgust upon the face of Steele, "only rats, we had to clean 'em out again, and the bodies of the slain are piled in a heap out in the yard."

"Yaw-yaw, dat ish vat I schdumbled over, un tought it vas a fedder ped!" ejaculated Jacob, at which the others, except Sol Miserleigh laughed immoderately.

"And what on earth brought you here at this time of night Mr. Miserleigh," asked Brown anxiously. "Surely something of extraordinary urgency and importance?"

"Yes," replied Sol Miserleigh as they sat down before the fire. "Yes, a matter of considerable importance, and" glancing up at the clock) "I must explain briefly, as it is near daybreak and I must get away from here as soon as possible. I went to Jacob's house and brought him with me that I might

explain matters to you collectively. Now this is the situation. The circumstances attending the death and burial of William Barnes, have disturbed and perplexed me greatly and I now perceive that I cannot safely carry out my original plans. In brief, we cannot put out of our way at once, Sam Slick and Joshua Humble, unless circumstances are favorable to a fatal accident to both at different times and in widely different places. Slick, as you know, is with Langdon in Cincinnati. As previously explained to you, he knows too much concerning my affairs and quite recently I have observed in him unmistakable evidences of reformation; therefore he is a living and constant menace to me, and his removal has become an imperative necessity."

"Old Humble, since the death of William Barnes, and also influenced by the near approach of the day of his release from financial obligations to me, has become very peculiar in his manner, and has excited my suspicion that he intends to betray me as soon as he is safely out of my clutches. When aroused he is a very firm and resolute man and consequently dangerous to trifle with. I do not know positively, but I suspect that he is conniving with old Prye to ruin me, and I want to throttle him effectually before he can possibly accomplish his purpose. If I can get these two men out of the way, I shall have no fears of old Prye and I can manipulate the boy with ease. I want to keep a constant watch on

Humble from the time he leaves my office at night until he returns to it in the morning. There will be no need to watch him during the day while at my office as he will be powerless to harm me right under my eyes. I also want to have Sam Slick watched, and as soon as a favorable opportunity presents itself, it will be decidedly in order to have him meet with a fatal accident. The details of the work I leave wholly to you, but begin at once, and when you have matured your plans explain them to me fully before you begin in order that I may understand and if need be second all your movements. As for your pay, it shall be liberal and in proportion to your success. Give your time wholly to my affairs until I am safely through my difficulties, and you will find it far more safe and profitable than any other enterprise in which you can engage. And now I must go. Report to me through Jacob who can safely come to me at my office or elsewhere at any time." With a final "Good morning, gentlemen," he opened the door and passed out, leaving the four precious rascals in silent communion with their own thoughts.

CHAPTER XX.

A STRANGE VISITOR.

On a dark and stormy night, an aged man, whose bowed and trembling form was clad in rags, limped painfully along a street in a quarter of the city inhabited chiefly by laboring people; entered an alley, ascended a flight of steps to the back door of a residence, tapped gently on the door with his hand, and then leaning heavily upon his cane, waited in silence for the coming of the person whose footsteps he could hear within. A few moments later, Joshua Humble with a lamp in his hand opened the door and said in a surprised though kind voice, "Well my good man, what do you wish?"

"I am cold, weary and hungry," replied the stranger in a loud shrill voice, "and—"

"And such a wretched night," interrupted Mr. Humble sympathetically. "Well, come in, my good man and we will endeavor to make you comfortable." As the stranger entered, Mr. Humble closed and bolted the door, and as he turned around to invite his visitor to follow him into the sitting room where a glowing fire of coal in a grate gave an air of coziness and comfort to the room, he stag-

gered backward in amazement, for there before him stood Judge Prye, holding in his hand a snow-white wig, and an old wool hat.

"Merciful Saints!" ejaculated Mr. Humble, holding up his disengaged hand in astonishment, "merciful—" but Judge Prye with a quick gesture checked his further speech, and silently entered the sitting room, and as the Judge glanced quickly around and observed that the window curtains were all down, he turned to Mr. Humble and asked:

"Have you a watch dog?"

"Yes, one with whom it is not safe to trifle."

"Can you put him outside without being discovered?"

"Yes, through the side basement window."

"I would advise you to do so at once, as your house is being watched both front and rear."

"Watched?" queried Mr. Humble with surprise. "Watched? and pray by whom—and for what purpose?"

"That I will explain after you have put that dog outside, and you cannot do so too soon," replied Judge Prye in a decisive tone which was almost a command, and as without further speech, Mr. Humble hurried out of the room to comply with his suggestion, Judge Prye hastily removed his wet and tattered outer garments, and when Mr. Humble returned, he found him seated complacently before the fire dressed in his usual every day apparel, evi-

dently enjoying the warmth and comfort of the room. As Mr. Humble drew a chair near the fire, and was in the act of sitting down upon it, he was startled by the savage growl of the dog immediately under the front window, and the sound of retreating footsteps, and hastening into the hall, he quickly opened the front door, and observed a man in rapid flight turn the corner of the street half a square distant with the dog in close pursuit snapping savagely at his legs. Closing the door, he returned to the sitting room, and was describing what he had seen, when there was a rushing sound in the alley in the rear of the building, accompanied by a fierce snarl of the dog, and then again the echoes of fleeing footsteps.

"That will settle them for the present, and doubtless for the night," observed Judge Prye with a smile expressive of amusement and gratification," and I may now explain the object of my visit without fear of being overheard by Miserleigh's spies."

"Miserleigh's spies?" echoed Mr. Humble.

"Whom your dog has put to flight," responded Judge Prye. "The truth is, Mr. Humble, I have earnestly desired a conference with you for several days past, but could not contrive a way to accomplish it without Miserleigh's knowledge, which I especially desired to avoid. I neither dared to send for you nor to meet you on the street and I was really at my wits ends. But when it began to rain

tonight, I conceived the idea of coming here in disguise, and remembering that there was an old suit of clothes in my tool house belonging to my gardener, I went out and drew them on over my other clothing, found a stick for a cane, and at once began my pilgrimage. My first intention was to enter here by the front door, but as I hobbled along the street half a square distant, I observed a man standing under the gas light just across the street from your front door whom even at that distance I recognized as one of Miserleigh's blood hounds, and making a detour of the block, I came in by the rear entrance. As I entered the alley, I observed a man standing within twenty-five feet of your rear door, who as I advanced, retreated slowly before me, and as I knocked on the door, I observed that he halted and listened, and that most positively confirmed my suspicions, which is the reason why I spoke in a loud tone and in such piteous accents, when you opened the door."

"And now, concerning the object of my visit: I have lived in St. Louis about eighteen years, and first formed your acquaintance about fifteen years ago. During the past five years, I have known you quite intimately, and have been utterly unable to understand how it could be possible, that a man of your fine intelligence and excellent culture, of your large and varied experience in all of the avenues of business, could be in daily association with Sol. Miser-

leigh under any circumstances. Of course, I cannot but conclude, nay, I know, as positively as it is possible to conceive without possessing an intimate knowledge of all the facts, that you are not his willing accomplice. In the first instance, your association with a man of his character under any circumstances is a matter of wonder to me, to say nothing of your continuance in his service in a very obscure position, for a period of twenty-five years; therefore I readily comprehend that there must be some reason of vital importance for the existence of such a condition, of a noble human life being deliberately wrecked, and yet not making the slightest effort to save itself though the means of self-preservation are easily within its grasp. I have pondered over this matter for years, and have earnestly endeavored to solve the mystery, in the hope that I might be able to accomplish your emancipation, and at the same time enable you to escape Sol. Miserleigh's vengeance. But all of my independent efforts to fathom the mystery have been utterly fruitless, while your condition has steadily been growing worse from day to day, until it seems to me that it must now be simply and utterly intolerable. By careful inquiry I have obtained a slight inkling concerning your business standing and character before you became associated with Miserleigh, but that information which I reject as unreliable is founded chiefly upon the feeble recollections of old men—very tame and gossipy re-

miniscences and furnish not the slightest clew to the cause of your virtual enslavement. I am thoroughly in earnest in my purpose to befriend you, and at the same time defeat the wicked machinations of a scoundrel. Will you not give me your perfect confidence and permit me to aid you in recovering your personal freedom, your home and your fortune?"

When Judge Prye began to speak of Sol. Miserleugh's cruel intrigue, Joshua Humble seemed slightly displeased, and as the Judge proceeded his face became flushed, and with bowed head and folded arms he sat mute and motionless, gazing steadily upon the carpet at his feet. He was evidently in a condition of great nervous excitement, for he trembled and breathed with heavy laborious respiration like one in slumber. As Judge Prye uttered the last words and paused for a reply, Joshua Humble started as though suddenly aroused from sleep, arose quickly to his feet, straightened himself to his full height, and for several moments looked vacantly upon the wall, evidently unable to command his thoughts or to utter a single word. His mind was in a tumult of conflicting emotions—in a condition of chaos, and he began to walk the floor and to wring his hands and moan. Finally he paused and pressed his hand to his forehead as though striving to recall something to memory, and then, as though unable to collect his thoughts, he began again to pace the floor still wringing his hands. His face grew white until it assumed the dull

leaden pallor of the dead, and to his eyes came that awful fixed stare which is ever the forerunner of mortal dissolution. As he walked to and fro like a somnambulist, Judge Prye became extremely anxious, evidently fearing that the mind of Joshua Humble had lost its balance, and he arose and stepping quickly to his side placed his hand upon his shoulder and said to him in a kind voice: "My good friend, try to be calm and to collect your thoughts. You are a strong, brave man, and can surmount every difficulty that may beset you, if you will only exercise your will power. See! it is your friend who stands before you—your faithful friend, Andrew Prye!"

"Ah!" said Joshua Humble dreamily as he turned and looked into the face of Judge Prye, "Yes, I know—I know—" and then the light of intelligence suddenly came back into his eyes and he covered his face with his hands and wept like a child, while Judge Prye gently guided him back and seated him in his chair before the fire.

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. HUMBLE'S STATEMENT OF FACTS.

A long interval of silence ensued, a silence extremely painful to Judge Prye, broken only by the sobs of the strong man seated on the opposite side of the fire. But gradually the violence of Mr Humble's emotion abated, and he arose to his feet, wiped the tears from his face, and said in a natural voice: "The struggle is over, Judge Prye, and I have gained a victory over pride. Permit me to walk a few moments to steady my nerves and then I will be the Joshua Humble of twenty-five years ago, before the blight of Sol. Miserleigh's wicked intrigues fell upon me to poison my life and to wreck my dear boy." Then he began to walk the floor with head bowed and hands clasped behind his back. Ten minutes he paced the floor with quick nervous tread which gradually grew steadier and slower until it became as regular as the ticking of the clock. It was the firm elastic step of a man conscious of his strength and full of hope and faith, and he seemed to grow taller and broader and stronger until he paused before Judge Prye with clear eyes, steady nerves and

calm face. He was absolutely handsome and his bearing was graceful and dignified.

A moment he stood in that peculiar position looking down upon the face of his friend and then in a firm natural voice he said as he extended both of his hands to Judge Prye: "God bless you, my friend! You have resurrected me from a living death, and you will find me a faithful, discreet and courageous assistant in your endeavors to bring Sol. Miserleigh to justice, and in every other good cause. I am in the twilight of the evening of life and night is coming swiftly on, but the day is not quite ended!"

Judge Prye arose and warmly grasped the hands of Joshua Humble and replied: "Why my dear friend, you are now the man my imagination has always pictured you to have once been, and I am rejoiced beyond measure."

With these and many more kindly expressions of mutual friendship, Judge Prye and Joshua Humble resumed their seats before the fire and Mr. Humble said:

"Briefly, this is the history of Sol. Miserleigh's intrigue, of which I have been the victim: Twenty-five years ago, the residence in which Sol. Miserleigh now lives was my property and my home. My wife was then living, and we had one son and one daughter, the latter then but five years old, and my son twenty-two. I was entirely free from debt, and by the exercise of unusual prudence and by careful

attention to business I had accumulated about one hundred and forty-five thousand dollars in stocks, bonds and cash. My real estate holdings consisted of my residence, my office building, and this little home which I deeded to my widowed sister before Sol. Miserleigh accomplished my ruin. My business, that of stock brokerage, was very safe and profitable, as I never engaged in speculation on my own account, and after my son Claude had, at the age of eighteen graduated from the High School I gave him employment in my office which was the same which Sol. Miserleigh now occupies, and carefully trained him in my business, so that when he became of age, I gave him a partnership in my business equal with myself. A year previous to that, Sol. Miserleigh, who was then a common note broker and the loaner of money in small amounts on chattel mortgages, and who had just begun to dabble in stocks, rented desk room in my office, and as I afterwards ascertained immediately began to poison the mind of my son by suggesting to him and encouraging him in illegitimate speculations in a small way, which Miserleigh manipulated and always reported immense gains, and paid over to Claude his share of the profits with strict injunctions of secrecy. This speculative disposition Miserleigh carefully cultivated in Claude, until he attained his majority and became an equal partner with me in my business, and then Miserleigh began to lay his snares to entrap my son

and to accomplish our financial ruin and absorb my entire estate. It is a long and painful story and minute details are unnecessary; suffice to say that within a year and a half from the time when Claude became my business partner, he had, without my knowledge or slightest suspicion encumbered our firm with a debt of one hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars, and Miserleigh was our sole creditor. Furthermore, Claude in a last desperate effort to retrieve his misfortunes, had added crime to the folly of his speculative ventures by forging the name of Sol. Miserleigh to a sixty days promissory note and had realized thereon and lost the entire amount in a single deal with Miserleigh."

"The first intimation I had of anything wrong in our affairs was the entrance to our office of an officer of the law accompanied by Miserleigh with a warrant for Claude's arrest upon a charge of forgery. Fortunately my son was out in the city at the time and consequently escaped arrest. After the officer had departed, Miserleigh explained to me the deplorable condition of my financial affairs, through Claude's speculations, and for the moment I was tempted to dash Miserleigh's brains out with a chair, but my better judgment prevailed in the struggle within me, between inclination to wreak vengeance upon him for his treachery to my boy, and his systematic robbery of myself, and overwhelming desire to save my son whom I loved better than my own

life, from disgrace, and so, I repressed my rage and indignation, and locking the door I held Sol. Miserleigh virtually a prisoner from noon until the following morning.

“During that time, to me an age of mental agony, I endeavored by arguments and entreaties to soften Miserleigh’s heart, and thereby avert disgrace and ruin, but with dogged persistency he held firmly to his purpose, and finally I was compelled to yield to his demands. It was a choice between my fortune and my boy, and I yielded the former to save the latter!

When I unlocked the door, just as day was breaking, I was utterly penniless, having transferred to Sol. Miserleigh everything of value of which I had been in possession but a few hours before, and in compliance with his demands had even emptied my pockets and delivered to him their contents, money, pocket book, watch, and even my knife and he took them all with the fiendish satisfaction of a miser gloating over his ill-gotten gains.

“The conditions of the compromise were the transfer of all of my property to Miserleigh, which was to constitute payment in full of the firm’s indebtedness to him, except the forged note which he agreed to honor, and to allow me to repay to him in installments, provided I would enter his employ at twenty-five hundred dollars a year. The agreement as to that was merely verbal (as otherwise, as he

urged, and in which he was correct) to have put it in writing would have constituted the compounding of a felony on his part and when he raised that point of objection, I could not of course insist upon a written agreement, and so, accepting his receipt in full on account of all other indebtedness, I unlocked the door and handed him the key, and stepped forth into the gray light of day-dawn, Sol. Miserleigh's Slave!

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM OPULENCE TO PENURY.

"It was a terrible fall from a dizzy height," continued Mr. Humble, "and a week later my dear wife died of a broken heart, and then with only our personal clothing we came here to live and Sol. Miserleigh and his mother and sister stepped into our home, Mrs. Miserleigh, in her fiendish eagerness to be sole mistress of the premises even hurrying our departure."

"And now my sorrowful tale is nearly ended, for it will be impossible for me to detail the terrible humiliation and suffering of my life since then. It is sufficient to say that eventually my daughter married and died leaving an infant daughter, and her husband being a shiftless fellow went away, I know not where, leaving the child to the care of my sister and myself. Claude's life, though for a time blasted, was not utterly wrecked. He did not dare to remain where Miserleigh could reach him legally and so drifted into the far west, and eventually into old Mexico, where for years he worked in the silver mines as a common laborer and saved from his wages

enough money to enable him to develop a very rich mine, recently, which he discovered soon after his arrival in that country. Every month he has written me a long affectionate letter, and sent me a small remittance, else we should have suffered for the common necessities of life, and yesterday I received from him a draft on New York for seven thousand dollars.

"During the first six months Sol. Miserleigh paid me promptly the salary he had promised, retaining a certain sum per month to apply in payment on the forged note, and then he utterly repudiated the agreement and cut my salary down to one hundred dollars per month. Of course I was wholly within his power and could not but submit to his terms, and so, at intervals he has continued to reduce my salary, always retaining a portion of it to be credited on the note, until now there remains but ten dollars of that indebtedness and when that is paid I shall be a free man if Sol. Miserleigh does not concoct some other villainous scheme to prolong my enslavement!

"Having an intimate knowledge of his business affairs in every detail—of his roguery and speculations in all their lights and shades, he fears me, knowing that I have carefully avoided all personal connection with his nefarious schemes, and that I have remained uncorrupted amid the sore temptations which during all these dreadful years he daily cast in my way, hoping that the pinchings of poverty might de-

grade my soul, and deliver me again and for life to his enslavement. Failing utterly in every attempt to keep me within his grasp, and knowing that my day of emancipation is fast approaching, it is but natural that he should hate and fear me, and hence the employment of spies to watch my movements, which fact my good dog has demonstrated to-night."

Throughout Joshua Humble's recital of the circumstances of Sol. Miserleigh's monstrous crime against him, and the heinous wrongs and cruelties which Miserleigh had inflicted upon him, Judge Prye sat motionless and almost breathless looking steadily—pitying into the grave and handsome face of Mr. Humble, and when the sad story was ended, he arose to his feet trembling with excitement and indignation, and stepping quickly to the side of his friend he said:

"My admiration for you is inexpressible. Yours has indeed been a noble slavery, and none but a good man could have passed through that terrible ordeal unscathed!" Drawing his chair close to the side of his friend, Judge Prye sat down there and the conversation was continued late into the night, during which Joshua Humble explained the mysterious disappearance of George Langdon and many other matters of interest and importance, not the least of which was the disappearance at the age of two years of the twin children of William Barnes and Aurelia Miserleigh.

"They were secretly and legally married by a magistrate who is still living," he added in conclusion, giving the name and address, "and who can doubtless produce the record. You will stay here to-night, will you not?"

"Yes," replied Judge Prye, "I had planned to remain until eight o'clock in the morning. The house will not be watched after your departure and I can safely leave without the disguise in which I came. Go to Miserleigh's office at the usual hour and conduct yourself in your accustomed manner. So continue from day to day until I notify you to the contrary. I must have time to think—to mature plans—to fortify our position with facts which cannot be controverted. I must have time to mature a general plan of attack upon his most vulnerable point, for he is a wily and dangerous antagonist. We must make sure of his capture and total disarmament at the first dash or he will certainly cheat the gallows or the penitentiary. Our trap must be skillfully constructed, and if we fail to entangle this snarer of men within the meshes of his own net and draw him to destruction, it will certainly be because we are not his equals in shrewdness and courage, for the means for its accomplishment seem to be already within our grasp. If you can, with entire safety, collect any further evidence against him, do so, and in the meantime I will prepare the way for his complete unmasking."

With the simple words: "It is well," Joshua Humble conducted Judge Prye to a sleeping apartment and kindly bade him good night, and then himself retired to rest, first kneeling by his bedside and returning fervent, heartfelt thanks to God, for his deliverance from bondage, so near at hand, and for the first gleams of the light of a day of happiness after a long night of years of toil and anguish.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OLD MOTHER HURT AT HOME.

Mrs. Sly, Becky Falser and Jerusha Snuffer were visiting old Mother Hurt at her home. It was a comfortable and handsome brick dwelling of eight rooms, nicely furnished, and was the sole property of Mother Hurt; but sad to relate, its value represented many moral and legal offences of which its owner would have been adjudged guilty if brought to trial therefor before any court of justice in the land.

Old Mother Hurt was making a bed quilt, the cover of which consisted of many different kinds and colors of silks sewed together. She called it "a crazy quilt," and indeed it was very appropriately named, the design being remarkable chiefly for its irregularity and complexity, the beginning and end of which could not have been easily discovered. It was symmetrical as a whole, but consisted of a labyrinthian combination of stripes and crosses running in every conceivable direction, each of different color and each different also in size and form, leaving the impression upon the mind of the beholder, that in

its construction the maker had worked without a plan or measure and in accordance with varying whims and fancies.

This ingenious article of handiwork represented in gross many days of labor—a few moments at a time—during many years, and that day, the seventy-fourth anniversary of her birth, Mother Hurt had fixed as the time for the completion of that antique specimen of her skill in needle work; therefore in celebration of two important events, the finishing of her quilt and the anniversary of the beginning of her life, she had invited the “Three Graces of Satan” to assist her in finishing the demented article upon which she had toiled so long. The visitors had gone to the residence of Mother Hurt early in the afternoon, and as it was their first meeting since the day of the funeral of William Barnes, the dramatic incidents of that sorrowful occasion were the subjects uppermost in their minds. Mrs. Sly seemed extremely anxious to discuss the Barnes—Miserleigh scandal in minute detail, and made several attempts to direct the conversation into that channel, while Mother Hurt was equally as anxious to avoid its discussion and hence the crazy-quilt and matters of ordinary neighborhood gossip occupied their time and attention.

The abundance of sap, which always oozed from the nostrils of Jerusha Snuffer, had been largely increased by a recent cold which had settled in her

head, and notwithstanding her frequent wiping with a large gingham handkerchief, the crystal drop which always clung to the end of her nose was much larger than usual, that day, and as it continually threatened to fall upon and soil Mother Hurt's sacred crazy quilt, it caused the old dame much uneasiness of mind; therefore when the drop of nasal mucilage would sag down like an inverted balloon and betray evidences of separation from the end of the spinster's scarlet nose, Mother Hurt's nervousness greatly increased and she would call out hysterically: "Ah—ah! it's going to drop, Jerusha; catch it qui—quick, before it soils the quilt!" at which the spinster would gore her weak watery eyes with her knuckles, elevate her nose and snuff back into her nasal passages the threatening drop, without pausing in her needle work or her cackling gossip.

Becky Falser, having eaten a pickle after having taken a large dose of calomel, two days previously, had from necessity, laid up her talking apparatus for repairs, and Mrs. Sly, being afflicted with asthma so that she weezed continually like a wind-broken horse, was unable to do more than suggest subjects for discussion between old Mother Hurt and Jerusha Snuffer; hence those two interesting individuals, when not wrestling with the threatening drop on the end of the latter's nose, were uttering in hoarse croaking tones, choice bits of scandal, each going a little further into particulars than the other, until the

subject was exhausted and another subject had been suggested by the ingenious Mrs. Sly.

Each of these four viragos was a scientific specialist in a different sphere of scandal, and unitedly they constituted a gratuitous detective agency which could discover the true inwardness of all domestic mysteries and miseries by the simple process of putting together this and that, and by their keen sense of smell could arrive at definite conclusions concerning all matters of individual honor and chastity. For instance: Mrs. Sly was a fabricator of long and varied experience and marvelous skill, an inventive genius as a scandal monger without a model and without an equal. Becky Falser was extremely imaginative and could always be depended on, not only to clearly and positively substantiate, but to greatly magnify and describe in minute detail all of Mrs. Sly's wonderful discoveries. Jerusha Snuffer was extremely analytical and could, by a very simple process of logical deduction discover most complex problems and could always "point an appropriate moral to adorn the tale." Old Mother Hurt's mouth was but a network of venom ducts from which exuded streams of false and slanderous words which poisoned the very fountains of the lives against which they were directed; and she was very skillful in the art of wounding desperately the feelings of everybody with whom she came in contact. It was a matter of record that she had never been known to

say one kind or charitable word concerning any human being living or dead, and that she could indulge in false and cruel insinuations even in the very presence of the person alluded to, with an air of such perfect innocence, and apparently so unpremeditated, that they were thrown into a state of mental paralysis for the moment, and so utterly speechless from rage thereafter, that she wholly escaped their just retaliation. Furthermore, unlike "The Three Graces of Satan," she was an educated woman, and her superior command of language and invective gave her great advantage of them in discussion; consequently they never presumed to differ with her in opinions upon any subject. In brief, they stood in mortal fear of her cruel, terrible tongue, and therefore when she bowed, they wagged their heads, and when she smiled, with one accord they shouted in boisterous laughter.

In early life, Mother Hurt had been educated for the practice of medicine, but her career as a regular physician was of brief duration and eventually she became a professional nurse of exceptional skill and was always profitably employed. Finally, when younger women, such as Mrs. Sly and Becky Falser became her successful competitors in that business, she abandoned it altogether having accumulated sufficient means to enable her to live without labor in ease and comfort.

The Jones, the Brown, the Thompson, the Smith

families, and indeed every other family within the range of their extensive acquaintance had been discussed by Mother Hurt and her visitors, and the conversation lagged from want of other subjects, as Jerusha Snuffer took the last stitch, and as she snorted back into her yawning nostrils the trembling crystal drop on the end of her nose, she said in a thick slobbering voice: "Well, women, the crazy quilt am done!" Mrs. Sly and Becky Falser murmured enthusiastic congratulations to Mother Hurt, who chuckled and simpered in girlish glee as she folded up her treasure and put it carefully away in a bureau drawer just as the servants announced that "tea" was ready.

Mother Hurt sat at the head of the table and poured the tea into large china cups, and it was very strong and hot. At her right hand sat Mrs. Sly, at her left Becky Falser, and at the foot of the table Jerusha Snuffer wrestled with the ever-appearing and ever-vanishing drop on the end of her nose, and smiled benignantly upon the hostess.

CHAPTER XXIV.

COMPLETION OF A CRAZY QUILT.

For a quarter of an hour this interesting company attended strictly to the business of eating and drinking, during which only words complimentary of the food and tea were spoken, and then, the more pressing demands of their voracious appetites having been satisfied they began to sip their tea and chew their food with more deliberation. Finally, Mrs. Sly laid down her knife and fork, grasped her tea cup by its handle, raised it to her lips, sipped the stomach-paralyzing liquid slowly a moment and said:

"As I was a sayin' folkses, when Jerusha was workin' on the quilt, that Miserleigh and Barnes' business is the worst tangled mess I ever hearn on."

Old Mother Hurt turned and glared angrily in into the face of Mrs. Sly, but the latter seemed wholly unconscious of the displeasure of the hostess, and looked away toward the foot of the table and bowed three times.

"Yes," responded Jerusha Snuffer with a gulp and a snort, "and that old O'Keefe woman a cryin' over the corpse and a kissin' it. Ugh! It makes the

cold chills run up my back to even think of touching a dead body, specially with one's lips."

"Oh, drat the O'Keefe woman and the corpse!" retorted Mrs. Sly sharply, "I was a talkin' 'bout Mad Aurelia and old Bill Barnes and their kids."

"I've hearn say that some people think that old Mother Miserleigh was at the bottom of the whole difficulty. She's a pizen old wretch and would murder her own kin without so much as winkin' her eyes, to carry her pint," said Becky Falser suggestively.

"An' law sakes alive women!" said Jerusha Snuffer with a gurgling snort, "all that ravin' of crazy Aurelia 'bout bein' married to Barnes unbeknown to anybody 'cept the magistrate is too funny for anything. Bill Barnes never married her—no, not he; and her ravin' 'bout Sol. and the old woman accusin' her of bein' bad, to pizen Bill Barnes' mind against her, is all blather. Oh, no! It'll take a more reasonable story than that to account for the twins and Bill Barnes' failure to claim 'em—eh?"

"Jes' so!" responded Mrs. Sly delightedly.

"And what became of the kids is what gets me, and that is what I would like to know!" said Becky Falser, blubberingly, as she held a napkin to her swollen and blistered mouth.

"Yes, that's the important pint," wheezed Mrs. Sly.

"I hearn tell that old Mother Miserleigh hired somebody to get away with the kids when they were

about two years old, 'cause Aurelia was crazy a mournin' for Barnes and the old woman didn't want to be bothered with 'em," said Jerusha Snuffer, "but I 'spect that's not so, for sh's too stingy to pay anybody for doin' what she could do herself; so likes as not she just slipped 'em away—one at a time and dropped 'em on the street at night—eh?"

"Likes as not," responded Mrs. Sly, gleefully.

While this interesting conversation was in progress, old Mother Hurt wriggled uneasily in her chair and sipped scalding hot tea with utter indifference as to consequences. She was evidently very much worried, and the keen analytical mind of Mrs. Sly fathomed the cause of her trepidation and determined to encourage the others to continue the discussion of the Barnes—Miserleigh mystery until Mother Hurt would be compelled to unload her overburdened mind of secrets pertaining thereto, which Mrs. Sly had long suspected her of possessing.

"And likes as not the old woman drowned 'em in the river?" added Mrs. Sly questioningly, bowing her head toward Mother Hurt with innocent assumption. It was a true shot and went straight to the mark, resulting in an immediate capitulation, for in response to Mrs. Sly's affirmative inquiry, old Mother Hurt elevated her chin, and wrinkled her nose and forehead and sneered.

"And why not, Mother Hurt?" persisted Mrs. Sly, "why might not Mother Miserleigh have slipped

the twins into the river one at a time? Surely she's none too good, I'll be bound, and she might easily have got rid of them in that way without bein' found out—Eh?"

"You talk nonsense! Mrs. Sly," replied Mother Hurt vehemently, "utter nonsense! Old Mother Miserleigh did nothing of the kind, and I know what I am talking about—which is more than you do, for you only guess while I speak from experience—actual personal knowledge. Now, woman, you have been chattering foolishness and guessing about what you can never know even the smallest part, of your own knowledge, because you have only rambling gossip to guide you. I don't like to talk about the Barnes-Miserleigh affair, because, to me, it is a very unpleasant subject and for very good reasons. But as you are all my confidential friends, and as this is my seventy-fourth birthday, and as you have helped me finish my crazy quilt, which I have been working on for many years, and as we are all together here, very quiet and very comfortable, and all happy and contented eating these good things and drinking this bracing-up tea, I'll tell you all about the twins and what became of them, for as I said before, I know what I am talking about from personal experience. But first you must promise me never to tell."

"Never—oh no! we'll never tell!" chimed the "Three Graces of Satan," as with one voice.

"But I'm particular about this, women," re-

sponded Mother Hurt dubiously, "very particular indeed, because I fear that the Miserleigh's will have trouble about their dealings with Aurelia and her children, and I don't want to be mixed up in it. It takes me all the time now to keep clear of trouble on account of other matters with which I have been connected, and I don't want a settlement of old scores on the Miserleigh account for it is a crooked, troublesome business from beginning to end, and I'm sorry that I ever had anything to do with it, because it is getting to be rather dangerous on account of so much being found out about it, by reason of Aurelia's wailings over the body of William Barnes. Everybody who heard her mournful story believes it from beginning to end, and they are all wondering what became of the twins, and that has caused me a great deal of uneasiness, because I know all about the matter."

"Well, women, to begin with, the first I knew of there being anything wrong with Aurelia, and at that time I had known her for ten years, was one night after William Barnes quit going to see her, old Mother Miserleigh came to my house alone, and said that Aurelia was sick—that she had been married to Barnes unknown to her, but that she would rather that Aurelia would die than be his wife, and that she and Sol. had succeeded in breaking up the marriage by making Barnes believe that Aurelia was not of good character. She wanted me to nurse

Aurelia, and I went with her that very night but found the girl raving crazy, and that ailment I could not cure. Well in due time the twins were born, and my professional services in that connection soon ended. Aurelia had been crazy several months, but when the twins were born she recovered her reason sufficiently to realize what had happened to her, and I never saw anybody so delighted as she was with her children. But she soon began to mourn because Barnes had deserted her, and raved furiously at her mother and Sol. for being the cause of it, and she soon lost her reason again. However, she clung to the children and fought so desperately whenever we attempted to take them from her that we were compelled to abandon that scheme temporarily. Barnes knew about the birth of the children and tried to get possession of them in a quiet way, but Mrs. Miserleigh foiled him and finally he gave up the idea. The children were born on the 14th of February, and it was just two years to an hour from that time when we succeeded in slipping away one of the children, the boy, whom I took from her side as she lay asleep in bed. The child was also asleep and I brought him here in a carriage and went back after the other child, a girl. As I entered Aurelia's room she awoke and discovered that the boy was gone and before I could get beyond her reach she knocked me down and undoubtedly would have killed me had not Sol. and his mother come to my assistance. Her grief

at the loss of her boy was simply terrible. She raved and tore her hair and prayed and cursed and wept. I shall never forget her awful grief. Well, as we could not get the child away from her we left her alone in her room, and while we were in the back parlor talking the matter over, we heard the front hall door slam and we hurried out just in time to see Aurelia, dressed only in her night clothing, with her child in her arms going swiftly out at the front gate. The weather was very cold and fine damp snow was falling fast. Sol hurried on his overcoat and hat. My carriage was standing by the pavement in front of the gate, Sol. and I got into it and were driven rapidly in the direction which Aurelia had gone, due westward. Half an hour afterward we found her by the roadside, a mile beyond the city limits nearly covered with snow and apparently dead, the child still clasped in her arms. We lifted her into the carriage and took her back home, put hot bricks to her feet and dosed her with brandy, and in about half an hour she revived, but her memory was entirely gone—even the recollection of her children had vanished utterly. I took the other child home with me that night and on the following day I farmed them out to an old negro woman, at three dollars a week each, telling her that they were orphan children of poor people. For several weeks I paid her promptly and then irregularly, and finally not at all. She was a drunken beast and abused

the little ones shockingly, and one cold stormy day they wandered away and became separated from each other in the crowd on the street. The boy traveled at least a mile and finally strayed into the office of a wealthy man who recognized him, but for very good reasons did not communicate the fact to anyone, but took the child to his home and cared for him as his own child. But the girl drifted into a saloon, one of the lowest dens of the city, and was adopted as daughter of the establishment and was cared for by the wife of the proprietor. Aurelia was dangerously ill for more than three months, but finally regained her health with her mind in about the same condition as it was before she lost her children. Now women, I have given you the straight of the story and don't you even lisp it to any living soul!"

"Oh, never! of course we won't!" chimed the "Three Graces of Satan" in chorus.

"But what became of the twins finally?" wheezed Mrs. Sly.

"Ah, yes," sputtered Becky Falser, "That's the most important pint."

"They do say," said Jerusha Snuffer drawing back the crystal drop from the end of her nose, "that both on 'em went to the bad."

"Who says so?" demanded Mother Hurt sharply, emphasizing the inquiry by a blow on the table with her hand, which made the dishes rattle.

"Ah, oh — well — ah — anybody who would think about it a minute would say that they couldn't help goin' to the bad," stammered the Snuffer nervously.

"Well they would be dead wrong, concerning one of them, and I know it!" replied Mother Hurt bowing vigorously toward Jerusha, and glaring angrily upon her.

"Ahem! it's getting late—nearly dark, I declare," said Mrs. Sly rising hastily, "and really I must hurry home."

"And so must I," sputtered Becky Falser. "Really I must go."

"Why, how very late it is to be shore," blubbered the Snuffer tremulously, glacing timorously toward the angry hostess. "I oughter ha bin home half an hour ago."

And so, without another word concerning the Miserleigh-Barnes affair, but with many soothing compliments and congratulations to the hostess, the "Three Graces of Satan" departed, each to her own home in different directions, each building in their elastic minds, huge mountains of fiction from the atoms of fact, brushed from the crumbling storehouse of the memory of old Mother Hurt.

CHAPTER XXV.

BARGAIN AND SALE OF OLD RAGS.

Sol. Miserleigh's acquaintance with Jacob Blum began in this manner:

Soon after old Jacob found Martha in the cellar of the abandoned building, almost in a dying condition, and carried her in his arms to his home, he was driving his old lame horse, hitched to his rickety old wagon along the street in front of the Miserleigh residence, and calling out lustily in his rasping dialect:

"Any old rags — bottles? Any old iron — rags?"

Mrs. Miserleigh heard his cry and having a large quantity of paper rags to dispose of, called to him from an upper front window of the mansion and old Jacob alighted from his wagon and walked around to the kitchen door to examine what she wished to sell. The old woman was a shrewd bargainer and haggled with Jacob over the price which he offered for the rags, and after much parleying and many offers and rejections, a compromise was effected and Jacob paid over the money for his purchase. As he proceeded to tie up the bundle, he com-

plained bitterly of his poverty with vehement earnestness, and explained how he was compelled to travel the streets early and late, through heat and cold, sunshine and storm, day after day, and year after year for a meager subsistence. He ended his pathetic complaint by saying that he had a sick wife to provide for, and also an orphan girl whom he had found in a nest of straw in an old hog-head in an abandoned cellar, suffering from malarial fever and had taken her to his home.

Mrs. Miserleigh, for some reason which she could not have explained even to herself, immediately became much interested concerning the child and questioned old Jacob closely as to its age, color of hair, eyes, complexion — and in fact elicited from him a minute description of the girl, together with the interesting and startling information that she wore a gold chain around her neck to which was attached a small gold locket, on which was engraved her name: "Valentina." But, said Jacob in conclusion: "She shall be my daughter und I name her Marthe."

While Jacob talked in a whining tone and carefully tied up his bundle, Mother Miserleigh was thinking very fast. She had unexpectedly obtained a clew to what she had long and earnestly desired to know, and she was planning how she could ascertain to a certainty whether or not her suspicions were correct, and at the same time keep Jacob in utter ignorance of her purpose. As he tied the last

knot in his bundle her face brightened, for she had matured her plans in that brief moment, and as he lifted the bundle to his shoulder she said to him:

"What is your name?"

"Yacob Blum," he replied balancing the bundle on his back, and leering up at her from under the brim of his old Scotch cap.

"Where do you live?"

"On Biddle between Fifth and Sixth."

"You say that you are very poor?"

"Yaw Madam, very poor."

"And you have a sick wife?"

"Yaw, yaw very sick."

"How long has she been sick?"

"Tree year."

"And you are not able to employ a physician?"

"Nein, Madam."

"I know a lady physician," said Mother Miserleigh reflectively, "who is very skillful and I will send her to attend your wife at my own expense, if you wish me to do so. It is a pity and a shame that anybody should suffer from want of medical attendance in this land of plenty."

Jacob was not only willing that Mrs. Miserleigh should send the doctress to attend his wife, but expressed his gratitude for the kind offer, and then departed calling out with renewed energy and vehemence as he mounted the seat of his wagon and rattled along over the rough macadamized street:

"Any old rags — bottles? Any old iron — rags?"

He had not driven a dozen squares before a messenger was dispatched by Mrs. Miserleigh to Mother Hurt and within an hour thereafter the two women were seated close together in the front parlor of the Miserleigh residence, talking in low tones very earnestly. Mrs. Miserleigh had repeated to Mother Hurt in minute detail her conversation with Jacob, and in conclusion said:

"And now, Mrs. Hurt, I need not make any further explanations to you, for you will readily understand that I desire to obtain certain information of great interest and value to me and that I require your assistance in the matter. You will visit Jacob's wife professionally?"

"Most assuredly I will."

"And you will continue your visits until you obtain positive information concerning the girl's identity?"

"With pleasure, and an interest second only to your own."

And then you can pronounce the old woman's case incurable when you have attained your object and discontinue your visits, with some general instructions as to diet, cleanliness and so forth."

"Precisely."

"Well then, Mrs. Hurt, the matter is settled. You will go at four o'clock this afternoon when Blum will be at home, and do not leave there until

you have seen the girl and obtained as much information as possible concerning her, without exciting old Blum's suspicion. You will not need to remain there more than an hour and can return here before six o'clock. Sol. will return home from his office at seven and may ask some very embarrassing questions if he finds you here. Go now, and return as soon as possible."

"I can return by half past five, I think," replied Mother Hurt as she hurried away.

Promptly at four o'clock the doctress was ushered into the squalid apartments of the Blum's family which was separated from Jacob's rag store-room only by a thin board partition through which came the fumes of the filth which the rags contained, filling the room with a sickening odor. Jacob met her at the door and escorted her through a narrow passageway into a dark bed room where she found old Leah bolstered up in bed and in great agony. The usual examination of the tongue, skin, eyes and pulse of the patient followed and then, after a few moments of reflection, Mother Hurt pronounced the disease liver complaint, and was in the act of opening her medicine case when Martha entered the room, bearing in her hands a tray on which were some dishes containing food which she had just prepared for Leah. She had closed the door behind her and advanced half way to the bed when she obtained a full view of the face of Mother Hurt, and

she started and recoiled in terror and the tray almost fell from her hands. Old Leah's quick eyes took in the situation at a glance, and she called out sharply to Martha who advanced and placed the tray upon a stand at the head of the bed, and hastened toward the door through which she had entered; but old Leah called her back and explained to Mother Hurt that Martha was a queer, timid child.

The doctress looked into the face of the trembling girl searchingly a few moments and traced out every feature of mad Aurelia. These were her thoughts: "How beautiful she is, and how pure. How has she passed through the fire unscathed? It is a wonder of wonders, but it is true, for I can read a human soul at a glance. How like Aurelia! her very image, only her hair and complexion which are those of her father."

"How old are you, dear?" inquired Mother Hurt, in a soothing tone, addressing Martha who stood at the foot of Leah's bed, with white face and downcast eyes.

"Twelve years," she replied tremulously in a voice barely audible.

"What is your name?"

"Jacob and Leah call me Martha."

"But what was your name before you came here?"

"Valentina."

"What was your father's name, I mean?"

"I don't know, I never saw him, at least I don't remember him."

"With whom did you live before you came here?"

"I lived alone with Hero, my dog, anywhere that we could find shelter, sometimes in a dry goods box, sometimes in an unoccupied building and finally in a cellar where Jacob found me sick and brought me here."

"But how did you get clothing?"

"Paul — Paul gave it to me!" replied Martha as a grieved expression, which was very pathetic came to her mouth. "Paul who is dead — he must be dead or he would find me!" and she began to weep and sob.

"My God, Aurelia!" thought Mother Hurt, as she noted the expression of the child's face and listened to her pathetic sobs.

With a great effort Martha suppressed her emotion, wiped the tears from her face, turned and looked boldly into the eyes of Mother Hurt and said:

"And who are you? Where have I seen you before? I have known you well, but where or when I cannot remember! When I was very young — when I was a baby in a great house with a tall tower at one corner! or have I been dreaming of it all my life?"

"It was only a dream, child — only a dream," replied the doctress in an unsteady voice as she opened her medicine case. "Only a dream dear, and

dreams are sometimes very like reality. Go now," and as Martha passed out into the kitchen and closed the door softly, Mother Hurt dealt out some medicine, gave the necessary directions for administering it, and departed leaving Jacob alone with Leah. He had not uttered a word after Martha entered the room, and cowered back in terror as she came into the presence of Mother Hurt. His little bead-like, rattish eyes sparkled with intelligence and so utterly absorbed was his mind in its efforts to discover the mysterious link of circumstances which united the lives of the old doctress and the child, that for the time being he was absolutely dumb. As the conversation between Martha and Mother Hurt progressed he read the truth from the minds of each, long before they could utter it, and when Mother Hurt confusedly dismissed the child, his shrewd mind had penetrated and explored the whole mystery. He was familiar with the Miserleigh-Barnes affair from first to last, having obtained his information from one of the Miserleigh's servants, from whom he purchased valuable articles filched from the house of his employer, from time to time, and therefore Jacob's identification of Martha was as complete as was that of Mother Hurt. In a twinkling he comprehended the marvelous generosity of Mother Miserleigh in sending the doctress to attend Leah, and he also, by a line of reasoning, discovered the part which the doctress had

taken in the abduction of the child from its mother. The precise reasons for the cruel and unnatural conduct of Mrs. Miserleigh he also correctly surmised knowing of her bitter hatred of William Barnes. All this came before his mind in regular order, with the clearness of a vision, as Mother Hurt questioned the child, and when the scene ended, he was as fully in possession of all the facts necessary to a thorough understanding of the situation and the exact circumstances of the case as was Mother Hurt, and he resolved to profit by his knowledge to the fullest extent.

That night Jacob Blum lay awake and planned how to accomplish his purpose. He went over the whole ground, step by step, now forward, now backward, now this way and then that way, until his survey was thorough and complete. Carefully he studied the motives of Mrs. Miserleigh in turning adrift the helpless young children of mad Aurelia in so heartless a manner, and he easily fathomed the mystery. Finally his eyelids grew heavy and at length closed in slumber, but his brain went right on with its work of thinking out the problem and when late into the night he awoke, his plans were all formed and perfected and with a sigh of satisfaction he turned over on his side and sank into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE DETECTION OF A DETECTIVE REVEALS AN INFAMOUS SCHEME.

When Mother Hurt entered her carriage in front of the apartments of Jacob Blum she was in high glee because of her success in identifying Martha, and yet she was much agitated because of Martha's partial identification of her. Still she did not fear that the child would be able to positively identify her as her abductress, and hence gave herself no serious concern. While she was still revolving these thoughts in her mind, her carriage drew up in front of the Miserleigh residence and she alighted and hurried through the gate and up the paved walk, and was met at the front hall door by Mrs. Miserleigh, who immediately conducted her to the front parlor.

"Well, what success?" inquired the hostess in an anxious tone as they sat down close together.

"Excellent!" replied Mother Hurt confidently. "Your surmises were correct. It is Valentina."

"You are quite sure?"

"Perfectly. There is not even the shadow of a

doubt in my mind. Her resemblance to Barnes is very marked, and to Aurelia, why it is simply startling! Strange as it may seem, it is nevertheless true that she recognized me, although she could not remember where or when she had known me." Then Mother Hurt proceeded to give in detail an account of the incidents of her visit to the Blum family, and when she had concluded her narrative Mother Miserleigh said:

"You have done well, Mrs. Hurt, and have again placed me under great obligations to you. Of course Valentina is corrupt?"

"Indeed no! She is as pure and guileless as a babe."

"A thousand wonders!" exclaimed Mrs. Miserleigh excitedly.

"Yes," responded Mother Hurt earnestly, "ten thousand — thousand wonders! but it is nevertheless true. She is pure and innocent, and very — very beautiful. But I must go now for it is nearly time for Sol. to return home."

"Yes, he will be here very soon. Drive one square west and then south and east around the opposite block and you will avoid meeting him."

As Mrs. Miserleigh talked, they had passed out of the parlor and along the hall to the front door, and in the vestibule they parted without ceremony or further speech between them.

About ten o'clock on the following morning,

Jacob Blum rang the door bell of the Miserleigh residence and was admitted by the servant but left to stand in the front hall until the mistress came to him.

"Goot mornin' Mischtreß Miserleigh," said Jacob, doffing his cap and pulling his scalp lock in obeisance as Mrs. Miserleigh approached him.

"Why," she responded sharply without returning his salutation, "why, what are you doing here? I have no rags to sell today — I sold you all I had yesterday."

"Yaw, madam," he replied, again pulling his scalp lock, "but I vant no rags dis mornin', I vant somedings petter, I cooms on udder peeschness."

"What business? What are you talking about?" she demanded sternly.

"Dis!" he replied straightening himself to his full height and flushing with anger. "I cooms to talk mit you about Martha."

"You mean the girl whom you found in a cellar on Commercial Alley?"

"Yaw madam, und you must not talks to me in dat done."

"I'll have none of your insolence!" she responded threateningly, "I know nothing of your pauper girl and care less. Because I took pity on your sick wife and sent a physician to attend her at my own expense, you presume to return to me and demand

something for the girl. What does she want? A seal-skin sacque, a silk dress and diamonds?"

"Nein, madam, Martha wants noddings mit you, und you ought do know somedings 'bout her for she vas de daughter fon your daughter Aurelia und Bill Barnes, und you knows it!"

Mrs. Miserleigh was amazed by Jacob's blunt avowal. She perceived that in some manner, which she could not even conjecture, he had obtained all of the essential facts concerning the conjugal relations of Aurelia and William Barnes and the birth of their children and their abandonment, but she resolved to put his knowledge to a severe test, and therefore responded quickly in the same tone:

"You talk nonsense — utter nonsense! You find a pauper girl and conclude that she resembles Aurelia. You remember the false gossip of years ago, and you arrive at conclusions in accordance with it, and you come here to insult me with them in return for my kindness to your sick wife."

"Nein, madam," replied Jacob slowly and respectfully. "You vas all wrong in vat you say, und you knows you vas wrong. I cooms not do insult you madam, in any vay, und if you will lischden batiently do vat I say, you vill see dat vat I schpeak vas drue. I vas your friendt, und I cooms to talks mit you, cause vy? Cause you vas in a bad fix for vat you do mit Aurelia und her schildther. If I vas your enemy I goes to William Barnes und he gief

me much monish for de girl und he gief you troubles. Vell now, I found out all aboutt William Barnes und Aurelia und de twins, fon Jim Boyle who vas your servant und vas deadt now. He used to schdeal silver schpoons und clodings fon you und I buys 'em. Vell, he hears you and Sol. talk about de two schildthen fon Barnes und Aurelia und so he tole me all aboutt idt. Vell, ven de ole vomans doctor coom do see Leah yeschterday und talks mit Martha, I remember vot Jim Boyle tole me, und I see how frightened Martha vas und knows de ole vomans, but can't remember ven she first knows her, und I remember dat someone schdole de childthen fon Aurelia, und I know dat de ole vomans vas de theif. Und den I knew vy you sent de ole vomans doctor to Leah vas because I tole you yeschterday dat I found a girl named Valentina und took her to lib mit Leah und me. Lascht night I lays awake und dinks him all oudt und I say to mine self: 'I vill go to Mischtreß Miserleigh und tells her vat I knows, und if she makes some peeschness for me mit Sol. den I schday her friendt. If not, den I go to Bill Barnes und get much monish for de girl."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A CRIMINAL ALLIANCE.

As Mrs. Miserleigh listened to Jacob's blunt but concise statement of facts which she had believed were known only to herself and Mother Hurt, she became greatly alarmed, for she realized that she was wholly at the mercy of a person quite as unscrupulous and vengeful as herself, and that her only course of prospective safety lay in the direction of a compliance with his demands, and when he had concluded his explanations, she had fully decided relative to the course she would pursue in the matter, and inquired in a tone of calm unconcern and utter indifference:

"What kind of business do you want to do with Sol?"

"I vas poor und needy, I have no monish — only enough to buy a vew rags, und I vant to do a big pesschness in ole cloding und iron und rags."

"And you want Sol. to furnish the money?"

"Yaw madam."

"Very well, he shall do so," she said patronizingly. "Sit down there (pointing to a servant's stool) while

I arrange the matter as you desire," and as he slouched down upon the seat with a triumphant, self-satisfied air, she passed into the dining room, took writing material from the mantel, sat down by the table and wrote:

"Sol: Jacob Blum wants to engage more extensively in the purchase and sale of old clothing, iron and rags. Loan him, without interest, whatever amount of money he may require for that purpose, and make him a present of two hundred dollars and ask no questions. You well know how charitable I am, and will readily understand that I am influenced only by pity for his forlorn condition. Cultivate close and confidential business relations with him and under no circumstances offend him! Do not mention this subject when you return home to-night, nor ever afterward.

"CELESTINE MISERLEIGH."

This she read over carefully and corrected its punctuation and emphasis, enclosed it in an envelope, which she sealed with wax stamped with her monogram, addressed the envelope: "Sol. Miserleigh," arose from the table, passed into the hall, and approached old Jacob who had risen from the stool when he heard her open the dining room door, and began pulling his scalp lock in obeisance, after the manner of people of foreign birth of low degree, at the approach of their superiors.

"Here Blum," said Mrs. Miserleigh patronizingly, handing him the letter which she had just written

to Sol. "I have in this instructed Miserleigh to make you a present of two hundred dollars in money, and to loan you without interest, whatever sum you may require for the business in which you wish to engage; and I have also told him to render you whatever other assistance you may need. I know you are a consummate scoundrel and would not hesitate for one moment to commit murder in order to accomplish your purposes; and doubtless for very good reasons you entertain a similar opinion of me. Such being the case, you will do well to remember that rogues among themselves never forget or forgive a traitor, and do not for one moment forget that it will be greatly to your advantage to deal honestly with me, and in good faith. On the other hand, if you deal treacherously with me in the slightest degree, the world will not be large enough to contain us both! What you want is money, and you can get more of it through my influence than by any other human agency. I know your nature. It is that of the serpent; you may by careful handling become in a manner docile, but may never be implicitly trusted. If you will remember that serpents often sting themselves to death in their efforts to poison their masters, you will never even dream of betraying me. As you doubtless know, Sol. is precisely one of your kind: as treacherous as an Indian, as cunning as a fox, and as dangerous as a serpent; but for all that he is an honorable rogue and will

never deceive nor betray one of his confederates. Go now, and never come to me again unless you have important information which you know I will not otherwise obtain, or unless I send for you."

As she uttered the last words, Mrs. Miserleigh placed her hand rudely upon Jacob's shoulder, pushed him out into the vestibule, opened the front hall door and thrust him out upon the front steps and pulled the door shut in his face. So overawed was he by her mastery, and so utterly confused by her vehemence that his lips were powerless to utter the reply which his mind had suggested and matured, that he could only murmur his thanks to the closed door and then silently depart. He was a conquered hyena. He walked down the flight of stone steps and along the paved footway across the lawn to the front gate, carrying the letter in one hand and his cap in the other, before he realized that his smooth bald head was exposed to a freezing atmosphere, and then he quickly put on his cap, passed out of the enclosure upon the street and hurried away toward the business center of the city.

An hour later Jacob Blum stood in the presence of Sol. Miserleigh in his office, and handed Mrs. Miserleigh's letter to him. To say merely that Sol. was greatly surprised and bewildered thereby would but imperfectly explain his mental condition, as he recognized his mother's handwriting on the envelope; and as he broke the seal and proceeded to

read the letter, his hands trembled so violently that the paper rattled and he was compelled to lay it down upon the desk before him and finish its perusal, while his head wagged and nodded like one with the palsy. He was a pitiable object as he sat there bending over the letter on his desk — a cringing groveling human cur, in abject terror of its stern uncompromising master!

When Sol. Miserleigh had perused the letter for the third time, he slowly returned it to its original fold, replaced it in its envelope, placed his hand upon it, invited Jacob to be seated and then said to him confidentially:

“Well Blum, I have known you by sight for — let me see! — at least fifteen years; but as we have never had any dealings together this may be regarded as our first acquaintance. I have heard a great deal concerning you and from my knowledge of your peculiar characteristics you and I ought to get along very well together. We can be of great assistance to each other in many ways: you need a moneyed friend who will help you when you need pecuniary assistance in your business, and I need a man of your personal peculiarities to help me in my business. You well know that we cannot always go straight in our dealings with people in general; in fact we are often compelled to go very crooked in our ways to success, and I need you to manipulate

the crooked part of my business. Now what do you say? Shall we become allies upon those terms?"

Jacob winked knowingly at Sol. Miserleigh, leered and grimaced until his rainbow-like nose and chin almost met, and the wrinkles went rippling away from his beetling brows up over his forehead and across his smooth bald head and disappeared in the little fringe of coarse gray hair at the rear base of his cranium. With gleaming eyes and dilated nostrils he drew closer and still closer to Sol. Miserleigh, wagging his head from side to side, until his garlic-tobacco perfumed breath was snorted into Sol's face, suggesting to his mind the unutterable horror of the fumes of the inferno, and old Jacob as an arch-devil. Nearer and nearer he approached until barely six inches of space separated his nose from that of Sol. Miserleigh, when, suddenly he raised his right hand and brought it down upon Sol's shoulder and hissed forth in a satanic tone the single word:

"Yaw!"

It came to Miserleigh like an electric shock and he sprang half out of his chair and appeared to be on the point of precipitate flight, but as Jacob drew back and resumed his former position, so also did Sol. A few moments of silence ensued during which Miserleigh regained his composure and finally resumed the conversation, by saying, as though nothing unusual had occurred:

"Well, Blum, we understand each other perfectly,

I think, and I trust that our relations will be both pleasant and profitable to us both. You want to engage extensively in the old iron and rag business?"

"Yaw!" replied Blum decisively.

"How much money will you need for that purpose?"

"Doo dthousand dollar."

"I will let you have that amount upon your simple promissory note for one year without interest, and as much longer as you may need it, renewing the note every twelve months." As Sol. talked he filled out a note for the amount which Jacob signed, and then Miserleigh filled out a blank bank check for twenty-two hundred dollars and handed it to Blum who merely murmured his thanks and then departed, leaving the scheming stock-broker revolving in his mind the important question as to how he might utilize his new acquaintance so as to recover indirectly the money which he had just loaned to him and which he knew would never be repaid.

Thus did the two scoundrels, each an accomplished specialist in his own particular and peculiar line of villiany, become partners in crime; Jacob, a human brute with beastly courage and instinct, and Miserleigh a human mental monstrosity with satanic heartlessness and cunning avarice.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN INGENIOUS SNARE WHICH FAILED TO CATCH THE GAME.

It was Saturday night, and people were hurrying homeward from their offices, stores and workshops, and each face was brighter and each heart was lighter and happier than it had been on the morning of that day. The pleasing anticipation of a day of rest for both mind and body, had cleared away the shadows from each brow and smoothed down the lines of care upon each face. As the blacksmith struck the last blows upon the glowing iron on his anvil, as the baker, the brewer, the butcher, the machinist and mechanics and laborers of all grades and occupations put away the implements of their toil; as the merchant, the professional man, the clerk, the saleswoman and the seamstress abandoned their occupations for the night and the following day and the night following, they also put down their burdens of mind, and only indulged in pleasant anticipations of the rest and peace and comforts of home.

As twilight came and deepened and street lamps flashed out their lights one by one, as the busy swift-

footed lighters hurried along, Joshua Humble closed his account book, on his desk in Sol. Miserleigh's office, took away his spectacles from his nose, carefully wiped the ink from his gold pen, descended from his high stool, put on his great coat and hat, walked over by the stove, turned his back to it, and leaning upon the handle of his umbrella, looked out of the window upon the street filled with an eager hurrying crowd of people of all ages, conditions and occupations. "Thus are we all hurrying to our Eternal Home! How many of that vast throng of people will be alive one year from today?" thought he sadly as he observed the impatient crowd jostle each other rudely in their efforts, each to outstrip the other in their race for that blessed goal: "Sweet home."

"Humble!"

It was the cold, harsh voice of Sol. Miserleigh, and that interesting individual turned around in his seat by his desk as he spoke, and held out a bank note which Joshua Humble took from his hand. It was his week's salary.

"I wish to pay the balance due on that note Mr. Miserleigh, and thus cancel my entire indebtedness to you," said Joshua Humble in a voice which startled the stock-broker — a voice which he had not heard for twenty-five years; and through his troubled mind in quick succession came trooping the ghosts of the dead past — phantoms of his cruel

wrongs and heartless robbery of the brave and honest man who stood calmly before him. Sol. Miserleigh was silent because he could not answer. His mind was in the midst of an emotional tempest, drifting here and there and for a moment he could not direct his thoughts.

Joshua Humble stood still and silent. He was a patient soul—and merciful—and observing his employer's utter confusion of mind he resolved to await the issue without further speech. Sol. Miserleigh turned around to his desk, fumbled some papers in his fingers, opened and shut drawers without even looking into them, and finally remarked in a tone of surprise:

"Why, it is getting dark!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Humble, "it is nearly six o'clock."

"Ah, yes, Mr. Humble, you made some remark about that note. I was thinking of something else at the moment and did not clearly comprehend your meaning."

"I want to pay the balance due on my note, and to receive from you all of the evidences of Claude's indebtedness."

Sol. Miserleigh arose from his chair, lighted the gas, resumed his seat, opened a drawer in his desk, took out the note, figured a few moments and finally said, while he drummed nervously on the desk with his fingers:

"Ten dollars, Mr. Humble."

"That is correct, and here is the money."

"Why, how did you know so readily? You cannot have kept the account in your mind during all these years."

"No, not in my mind wholly, but here," producing a memorandum book.

"Ah! Mr. Humble, you have been counting the days also doubtless."

"Yes, and even the moments."

"And why?"

"I am surprised that a person of your intelligence should ask such an absurd question," replied Mr. Humble slowly and with peculiar emphasis. "The past sir, cannot be lived over again, else many wrong might be righted and many iniquities easily atoned for and eventually forgotten."

"Do you allude to your son's misdemeanor?"

"Nor sir! I will not discuss that subject. Furthermore, I must positively refuse to discuss our past relations in any manner. Many years ago, I promised to pay you a certain sum of money in monthly installments and to serve you as an employe until that obligation was discharged, in consideration of which you agreed to deliver to me certain written evidences of Claude's indebtedness to you. I have fulfilled my part of the contract to the very letter, and now I am prepared to pay to you the amount

of the last installment, and thus to relieve myself forever from all obligations to you. Of course you will fulfill your part of the contract here and now. Certainly you cannot do otherwise than to keep your promise as faithfully as I have kept mine. I am growing old," added Mr. Humble sadly, "and I want to get even with the world before I am called hence. I do not want to leave behind me any unfilled obligations."

"Sixty-five is not old for you," said Miserleigh, "your physical development and constitution are simply magnificent, your health is excellent, your mind fresh and vigorous, and there are twenty years of good service in you yet. Why not begin life anew?"

"I will, from this day!"

Sol Miserleigh had taken the money for the last installment, and as he talked, had made the endorsement of credit on the note and handed it and the other papers to Mr. Humble, as he uttered the last words; and Mr. Humble was placing the note in his pocket book as he replied, and his words were literal truth, for the years of his bondage were forever ended and a new life was before him.

"Yes, Mr. Humble," said Miserleigh reflectively, "but you cannot begin again like a young man—you must have means. Of course you will resume your former business, and I tell you frankly that with your knowledge and experience, taken away from

my service, and probably used against me in the way of competition, I shall not feel so sure of success in the future as I have felt in the past. Now what do you say to a partnership with me?—a silent partnership on your part, of course. I will loan you five thousand dollars without interest and put in an equal amount, and we will share equally in the profits.”

“I appreciate your offer fully and in its proper sense, and I also fully understand it in all its bearings,” said Mr. Humble slowly, measuring his words, “but I cannot decide now. I must have time to weigh the subject more carefully. In the meantime I should like to continue in your employ.”

“Well, consider the matter at your leisure,” replied Miserleigh delightedly, evidently surprised out of his wits. “So long as you remain with me of course I shall not urge the matter. We have been so long and so intimately associated in business, that I would scarcely know how to continue without you. Hence my offer to you of a partnership with me, which is certainly very fair and liberal. You can remain in the office and manage the business here in all its details and I will attend to outside matters just as heretofore. But of course, if you accept a partnership, our relations will be quite different from what they have been in the past; it will be my duty and certainly my pleasure to treat you

with due respect and consideration. You will find Sol. Miserleigh the partner, quite a different man from Miserleigh the employer."

"For the present, I prefer to remain in your service as heretofore," replied Mr. Humble as they went out upon the street and locked the office door. "I must have time to become accustomed somewhat to my new condition and to gradually drift back to my former self, and then I will be prepared to engage in business on my own account."

"I appreciate your ideas in the matter," said Miserleigh, "and upon reflection I think the course you have decided to adopt, the wisest. I realize that your long service as an employe has, for the time being, in a measure, deprived you of the ability to think and act independently, and that you will require rest of both mind and body. Your salary hereafter will be fifty dollars a week and you will be at perfect liberty to fix your office hours to suit your own convenience. I will employ another man to do the laborious part of the work which you have heretofore performed, and you will take the desk formerly occupied by Sam Slick. Good night."

"Good night," responded Mr. Humble and each walked away in different directions.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PLIANT MENIAL TRANSFORMED INTO A MAJESTIC BEING.

A fine heavy mist was falling which was immediately converted into ice, and the pavements were very slippery, rendering walking difficult and dangerous. And yet Joshua Humble managed to make good speed homeward, passing on the way hundreds of young people going in the same direction. He walked, not in the former stooping, crouching, gliding manner of Sol. Miserleigh's menial, but with the upright manly bearing of Joshua Humble the stock broker of old; and as he strode along, a very giant in stature, bulk and power compared with the tallest and heaviest and strongest of the people whom he met, all of them marveled at his speed and strength in comparison with their own, for although they were straining every nerve in the effort they were unable to keep pace with him even for a moment. As he hurried along he revolved Sol. Miserleigh's proposition in his mind and smiled grimly. "Is it possible," he thought, "that Sol. Miserleigh does not know me yet? that he deems me capable of such consummate weakness and folly, as to pre-

cipitate myself headlong into his pitfall? No, no, Mr. Miserleigh, not today, nor tomorrow nor ever afterward! I shall remain in your employ for the time being in order to blind you as to my purposes until I can fully accomplish them, and then — well, then I will engage in business on my own account I presume." While his mind was still busy with these thoughts he drew near to his home, even within half a square before he realized that fact. Suddenly he became conscious of the locality and pausing on the street corner out of the gas-light, he looked carefully around him and up and down both streets. "No spies out tonight, the hounds called off," he muttered, "what can it mean? Ah, I comprehend, called in for conference. I must profit by my respite." Then he moved forward at a quick pace, ascended the steps of his residence, closed his umbrella and placed his hand upon the knob, but before he could turn it, the door swung quickly open and a beautiful little face peered out from behind it and a sweet little voice which trembled with joy said to him:

"Come in, grandpa dear! I have been watching for you so — so long — at the front window of the sitting room and saw you coming half a square down the street. Oh, I am so glad that you have come grandpa!"

Joshua Humble did not reply to the joyous prattle of little Alice, but hastily putting down his um-

brella, and relieving himself of his hat and great coat, he stooped down and clasped the child in his arms. As he arose to an upright position and the light of the hall lamp fell full upon his face, little Alice exclaimed surprisedly: "Why grandpa! how beautiful you look tonight! The wrinkles are all gone from your face, and your eyes are so bright and clear, and you are so tall and large — ever so much taller and larger than you were this morning! Did you meet some good fairy on your way home who made you young again?"

Again he did not answer because his heart was full of joy and his lips were sealed by its sweet spirit, and as little Alice nestled her head upon his shoulder and put her arms around his neck, he walked into the sitting room to receive the usual loving welcome of his good sister.

"Why, Joshua!" she said delightedly as he paused under the hanging lamp and turned his radiant face toward her: "How young you look tonight! Something unusually pleasant must have happened you today!"

"Yes, sister," he replied joyfully, "this is to me a bright and beautiful day-dawn of happiness after a long night of humiliation and woe! It is the day of my emancipation."

"And is it indeed ended?" she asked joyfully.

"It is finished to the very fullness and I am free!"

"Thank God!" and his faithful loving old sister put her arms around his neck and wept for joy.

"Now Auntie, why do you do so? Why do you cry when grandpa is so happy and beautiful?" exclaimed little Alice reproachfully. A good fairy met him on his way home tonight and made him young again. So do not cry Auntie dear, because he does not look as he did this morning." Then she continued to laugh and prattle until the evening meal was eaten, and then Joshua Humble announced that he would be compelled to go out to attend to some important business that night, and would probably not return before ten o'clock. To that proposition little Alice demurred most positively, saying:

"Now grandpa, here I've been waiting all — all day long — waiting for the night; and oh, how glad I was when I saw the darkness coming, for I knew that you would soon be home! And I sat by the window with my nose pressed against the glass until it was nearly frozen, looking out at the falling sleet, and watching to catch the first glimpse of you at the corner down there. And then at last you came, and walked so fast and proud and strong, while other people went slipping along as though they were afraid of falling. And then you came bounding up the steps and I opened the door before you could turn the knob, and then you were home at last and I was so glad! And now you are going

away again, and what will I do all the evening but sit by the fire and watch the blazing coal and think of you, dear grandpa and wish for your return?"

Joshua Humble was silent. He could never reply to the child when she began to plead with him, for she filled his very soul with herself and took his heart captive. His sister, who knew him so thoroughly, always went to his relief on such occasions, and as he stood there in speechless confusion looking down regretfully into the sad eyes of the pleading child, she observed the necessity of her mediation, and with a few kind words to little Alice she effected a satisfactory compromise, conditional upon the making of an entire new suit for her favorite dolly, and her being allowed to sit up and wait for her grandpa's return. And thus the matter stood as Joshua Humble departed, after many kisses and caresses from little Alice.

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOLF CONQUERED BY A LAMB.

A quarter of an hour later, Mr. Humble rang the door bell of a stately residence and was ushered into the library and cordially welcomed by Judge Prye.

It was their first meeting since the night of Judge Prye's visit in disguise to the home of Mr. Humble, although in the meantime they had been in constant communication by letter through the post office, whereby they had been enabled in perfect safety to concert and mature plans for Sol. Miserleigh's overthrow and punishment. During that correspondence, Mr. Humble had informed Judge Prye of the circumstances of George Langdon's enforced departure from the city, but was unable to furnish any information concerning his whereabouts. However, on that very day, the day of his emancipation from bondage to Sol. Miserleigh, that information had come to him in a startling manner, it being no less than a letter from Paul Dyke, alias Sam Slick, and the most surprising information which the letter contained was, that the wolf had been conquered by the lamb, and that Sam Slick the confidence man

and confederate of Sol. Miserleigh, had, through some powerful and mysterious agency, undergone a thorough moral revolution and purification, and had become Paul Dyke the honest man and gentleman.

Joshua Humble had read the letter carefully over and over again many times, and studied its diction and its thoughts expressed and implied, had weighed every motive with the delicate precision of an experienced and cultivated mind, and had finally arrived at the gratifying conclusion that Sam Slick had indeed and in truth undergone a thorough moral regeneration. Then in silence he bowed his head and thanked God for the deliverance of George Langdon from his awful peril. "In this wonderful accomplishment, I see Thy power and goodness and mercy, O, God, and unto Thee do I render the honor, and the glory, and the praise, Amen!" These were the concluding words of Joshua Humble's silent prayer, and the Great Recorder jotted them down in His eternal records of the just.

After Judge Prye had greeted Joshua Humble and had warmly congratulated him on his final deliverance from bondage to Sol. Miserleigh, Mr. Humble handed Paul Dyke's letter to him saying: "This will doubtless be as interesting and gratifying to you as it is to me. Truly, 'when God is with us who can stand against us?' I received this letter today."

Judge Prye took the letter from Mr. Humble's hand and perused it slowly and carefully to the last word, looked down upon the carpet a few moments thoughtfully, began and read the letter again, evidently weighing each word and analyzing each thought with the care and precision of an experienced jurist, and finally, when his mind had thoroughly digested every portion of it, he took his spectacles from his eyes, and holding them in one hand and the open letter in the other hand, he turned to Mr. Humble and said:

"Well, what do you make of it?"

"I believe his statements implicitly."

"And so do I," responded Judge Prye. "Who will say that there is no God?"

"None but those who are hopelessly afflicted with moral leprosy, or stricken with mental paralysis!" replied Joshua Humble fervently. Then taking from the inside pocket of his coat a package of papers, and also a package of photographs, he proceeded to show the papers to Judge Prye one by one and to explain them to him in careful detail. They consisted of copies of promissory notes in favor of Sol. Miserleigh and paid to him by estates against which they were held. These notes had originally been drawn for hundreds of dollars, and after the decease of their makers their amounts had been changed to thousands, and yet upon their face they showed not the slightest indication of abrasion, the erasures

having been performed with chemicals, and the enamel of the paper restored by the application of a resinous substance. These copies of the notes were in Mr. Humble's hand writing, but each of them was accompanied by two photographs of them, one being of the note as originally made and the other after the alteration had been effected. The latter showed the alterations with marvelous distinctness, although upon the note itself, the fact could not have been detected with the naked eye, or even with an ordinary magnifying glass with any degree of certainty. Judge Prye was deeply interested in the examination of these photographs, and marveled much at the wonderful skill of the forger, who had imitated the several styles of hand writing in every particular. The photographs of the altered notes showed not only the abrasion and re-enameling, but also the lines of the original writing were faintly visible to the naked eye and under a powerful magnifying glass, which Mr. Humble had brought with him, its every dot and hair line could be clearly traced.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A POACHER CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TOIL.

When Judge Prye had examined each of these photographs several times, he was about to lay down the magnifying glass, when observing that Mr. Humble still held two photographs in his hand, he was upon the point of asking the privilege of examining them also when Mr. Humble, anticipating his request said :

"First let us estimate the amount of money that Sol. Miserleigh has obtained by these forgeries and then we will examine these photographs, the most interesting of all of them."

By a simple process of addition and subtraction, Judge Prye ascertained the amount, which was in the neighborhood of one hundred and forty thousand dollars, and as he put down the pencil and leaned back in his chair, he said :

"I cannot understand how thirteen executors, all of them shrewd and experienced business men, could have been so thoroughly and grossly deceived. Why, their schedules of liabilities would have uncovered the frauds."

"They were not deceived," replied Joshua Humble slowly and positively. "They were all in collusion with Sol. Miserleigh, and fixed the schedules to correspond with the forged amounts, else as you have said, the schemes would have failed miserably; Sol. Miserleigh got one-half and the executors the other half of the plunder!"

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Judge Prye indignantly. "I wonder that heirs ever get anything!"

"It would seem a matter of extreme uncertainty," replied Mr. Humble, "if this evidence may be taken as a criterion for the manner in which executors generally discharge their trusts, but I think that such a conclusion would be rather unjust. I believe that there are many honest men in the world yet."

"And so do I believe," responded Judge Prye looking intently into Joshua Humble's face. "I know of at least one honest and brave man."

"And so do I know of a man of the same character," responded Joshua Humble with a quiet smile. "'What compliments pass when gentlemen meet!' You are probably aware that that is not original with me, but it fits the present circumstances precisely;" at which the two old gentlemen laughed and nodded their heads toward each other, as much as to say: "Thou art the man!"

"But how did you get these photographs?" inquired Judge Prye in the usual tone of an attorney interrogating a witness, and then observing a scarlet

flush coming upon the face of Joshua Humble, he added quickly, and in a regretful tone: "But don't construe that question as a doubt, even in the slightest degree. I have faith in you my dear friend—perfect confidence. For the moment, I presume, I imagined myself in court interrogating a witness."

Joshua Humble smiled and the scarlet flush faded from his face.

"Yes, I know," he responded with slight confusion, "and I do not wonder that the thought came to you in the nature of a surprise, for under ordinary circumstances it would have been impossible for me to have secured these photographs. As you know, there is a photographer next door to Sol. Miserleigh's office, the little old Frenchman De Baun. Well, I befriended him when he first came to this city direct from the old country, with a large family, in destitute circumstances, by loaning him money to enable him to engage in business on his own account and he has been my steadfast friend ever since. Well, De Baun took these photographs for me as per previous arrangements, when Miserleigh was out. He came to the office for the notes, photographed them and brought them back, one at a time, during eighteen years. And the strangest part of the whole matter is this: Although there is an excellent fire and burglar proof vault in the office—my office if you please—Sol. Miserleigh uses it only for the storage of his account books and kept these

notes and many other valuable papers in what he pleases to term a secret drawer in the desk which he occupies—my desk also in the days of my prosperity. The drawer, while not discoverable except upon close examination, was no secret to me and hence I experienced no difficulty in getting the papers, which was accomplished in every instance when Miserleigh was at the Exchange, between eleven and one o'clock in the day. These do not comprise all of the forgeries; there are many more of various kinds which he successfully accomplished, before the idea occurred to me to obtain evidence against him in this manner. Hence, whenever he took a note I had it photographed, thus obtaining a faithful copy of the original and when he raised the amount I had the note again photographed as you see."

"Wonderful! You are a wonderful man, Joshua Humble!" said Judge Prye in a hushed voice.

"No, my friend, only an ordinary man who simply performed his duty faithfully and without fear," was the modest reply of the man who always trusted in God and never faltered in the path of duty. "But here," he added, presenting to Judge Prye the two photographs which he had retained in his hand, "here is the surprise which I promised you."

"Judge Prye took the photographs from the hand of Joshua Humble and at the first glance gave vent to an exclamation of intense amazement. They were copies of the note of William Barnes to Sol.

Miserleigh, originally for three thousand dollars and changed to thirty thousand dollars, and as Judge Prye examined the one which had been taken after the amount had been changed, he said: "Why, Mr. Humble, this is bunglingly executed;" and then as he laid down the photograph and glass he added: "But tell me, what do you think. Is he man or Devil?"

"He is simply a man, devil-possessed," replied Mr. Humble.

"You are correct," responded Judge Prye. "The Devil would not be guilty of such folly, he never gets caught in his own trap."

"True," said Mr. Humble thoughtfully, "with this evidence against him in our possession it seems to be utterly impossible for Miserleigh to escape the penitentiary; and when murder may be added to his other crimes, the gallows may be his fate."

"Murder?" demanded Judge Prye.

"Yes, my friend, murder! Have you forgotten what Aurelia said over the body of William Barnes? how she charged Sol. Miserleigh with the murder of William Barnes' father?"

"No, Mr. Humble, I can never forget that sad and thrilling scene, nor the words of that wronged and unfortunate woman. I believed all else she said but have never thought seriously of that portion of her indictment of her brother. But now, with this indisputable evidence of his villainy before me,

I am prepared to beleive him capable of committing any crime, even murder."

"Yes, even murder in order to accomplish his purposes," said Mr. Humble, and then he proceeded to explain to Judge Prye, Sol. Miserleigh's criminal relations with Hairlip Brown, Amos the Fox, Lafe Steele and Jacob Blum, and finally the conversation drifted back to George Langdon, and it was decided that Mr. Humble should answer Paul Dyke's letter immediately in a friendly spirit and instruct him to remain with Langdon until otherwise advised. Then Judge Prye accompanied Joshua Humble down stairs to the front door of the hall and with the simple grasping of hands, and the utterance of "those kind old words: Good night," they parted.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A GREAT CITY AT SUNRISE.

It was early morning and white crisp snow which had fallen during the night lay deep over the entire city. The sky was cloudless, and the sun which was just peeping above the horizon sent up bright shafts of crimson and golden light, even to the zenith. In the residence portion, a few human toilers were abroad, struggling along knee-deep leaving furrows behind them like those turned by the plow of the husbandman upon the level fields of the white lands of Eastern Texas. Save those few early pedestrians, all else of throbbing, breathing life lay still in sleep, and the great world seemed to pulsate in space. "The witching hours when churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead," had glided away before those charm-laden moments when even "perturbed spirits" are lulled to rest, when slumber weighs heaviest upon human eyelids and death hath its most perfect counterpart in still and dreamless repose.

The "Three Graces of Satan" were abroad very early that beautiful Sabbath morning. Having entered into a copartnership as professional nurses, and

having received a call to attend a member of the family of the fishwoman of the city market, and the patient being very feeble, their united skill and wisdom was deemed necessary, and hence all of them had responded to the summons, which came in the dead hour of night and in the midst of a furious snow storm. Inasmuch as they had not accumulated sufficient means for the purchase of a conveyance for their professional use, and by reason of the lateness of the hour and the furious storm, it being impossible to obtain a conveyance, they were compelled to go on foot. To the three viragoes the way was long and difficult, and the journey very fatiguing, for the snow, which fell in clouds from the black sky, beat violently into their faces and sifted up under their skirts and sheathed their shoes with ice and balled up under their feet; and the wind twisted them around and knocked them together as ten pins are dashed against each other in a bowling alley. At the half way point of their journey of twelve long squares, Mrs. Sly declared that she must rest, and sat down on a doorstep with her back to the storm and wheezed like a wind-broken horse, while Becky Falser and Jerusha Snuffer formed themselves into a windbrake around her. By reason of the intense cold, the halt was brief, and as they started onward Jerusha Snuffer slobberingly declared that she had become a mere walking icicle, and at that instant, as if in confirmation of her declaration and in spite of her utmost efforts to prevent the

catastrophe, the crystal drop slipped from the end of her nose and was forever lost in the deep snow. Nevertheless, three hours thereafter as she sat in the warm sitting room of the fishwoman by the bedside of the patient and sipped hot brandy and water, another drop appeared on the end of Miss Snffer's proboscis and her consolation was complete.

It then lacked three hours of daylight and the fishwoman, in anticipation of her visitors' requirements having prepared a luncheon of cold meats, bread and butter, cake and pie to which she had added at the proper time a large quantity of strong hot tea, the three professors sat down with her at the table and bolted large quantities of food into their capacious stomachs. This they did in silence until they could contain no more without loosening their clothing, and then they laid down their knives and forks and began to sip scalding hot tea and to gossip.

To the three nurses the fishwoman was a valuable mine of interesting information concerning people high and low, rich and poor, sick and well, alive and dead; and contrary to their usual wont, they were content to gather in and coin in their brains the wealth of information which she yielded up to them without so much as an effort on their part, while they tanned their stomachs with tea. After a long rambling dissertation concerning the Miserleighbarnes affair, during which she astonished them

with her intimate knowledge of the circumstances of the case, and from which they gathered many new and valuable items of information, the fisherwoman paused to take breath, Mrs. Sly, evidently jealous of her knowledge of the subject, turned to her associates and said:

"I guess, women, we know something about that matter too—Eh?"

"In course we does," they both responded as with one voice.

"And what do you say to my opening her peepers a bit, Eh?"

The proposition was agreed to unanimously, and then Mrs. Sly proceeded to repeat Mother Hurt's narrative complete and ended by saying: "But the greatest mystery of the whole affair is, what became of the children afterwards?"

The fishwoman smiled derisively. She could "go them one better on that" she said and rocked her huge body from side to side in her very excess of gratification. Then she proceeded to tell the story of the boy's adoption and education by a wealthy gentleman whom she named, and then she told of the girl's wanderings and wretched life and of her rescue by Jacob Blum, and ended by saying:

And now women, I got all this information myself at my fishstall, a little bit at a time, from this one and from that one, who came to buy fish; and I figured it all out by myself, and put it all together,

and now you have the whole story complete—and it isn't second handed either. And now I'll go you one better still. Now hold your breath, everyone of you, or you'll bust wide open with surprise. Are you all ready? Well them:"

"William Barnes was murdered!"

"Murdered?" they all exclaimed in chorus.

"Yes, murdered by that boy Langdon."

"How do you know?" they all demanded in unison.

"Know? Well enough! As well as it is possible to know anything which I do not actually see. I got it from one of the richest men in the city."

"What is his name?" demanded Mrs. Sly wheezingly, in a half whisper.

"Well, I'll tell you women, but you mustn't tell, for I promised him not to connect his name with the story. He said I might tell the tale as often as I liked, but to keep his name out of it; and so must you, will you?"

"In course we will!" said Mrs. Sly, and her two associates, murmured approval.

"Well then," said the fishwoman, "his name is Sol. Miserleigh!"

While yet they talked, daylight began to appear in a faint flush upon the eastern sky which was visible from a window of the room in which they sat, and the patient requiring the attention of her mother, the "Three Graces of Satan" took their de-

parture, and hence, they were abroad very early that quiet Sabbath morning. As they struggled along through the snow, they were too busy with their own thoughts concerning the fishwoman's revelations with reference to the Miserleigh-Barnes affair to engage in conversation, and so they walked along in silence. But when they arrived at the residence of Mrs. Sly, Becky Falser and Jerusha Snuffer went in with her to warm by the fire which she had covered with ashes before her departure and only required to be stirred with a poker to burst into flame. As they sat before the fire enjoying its warmth, Mrs. Sly brought from the cupboard a bottle full of amber colored liquid and three glasses; also a pitcher of water and a bowl of sugar, drew a stand up before the fire, placed the articles upon it and said:

"Here women, take a sniff of 'oh-be-joyful' and a big one at that, or you'll have a death cold from this night's doin's."

Falser and Snuffer required not a second invitation, and so they mixed and drank, and mixed and drank again and continued to mix and drink the soul-destroying potion; and in the meantime they talked, first in their ordinary tones, then louder and still louder, going over in detail and discussing at length the fishwoman's revelations coupled with the story of Mother Hurt, until both the subject and their voices were completely exhausted, and then Falser and Snuffer departed and went staggering homeward and Mrs. Sly went staggering to bed.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MARVELOUS PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND ITS HISTORY.

Mrs. O'Keefe, in her own bedroom separated from the Sly apartments only by a thin board partition, had heard the entire conversation, and she was surprised and shocked beyond measure, especially by that portion of it relative to the cause of the death of William Barnes; therefore after she had attended mass, accompanied by her two stalwart sons and had washed and put away the breakfast dishes, accompanied by her eldest son, Denney, she repaired to the residence of her steadfast friend and former employer, Joshua Humble, and related to him in every particular the conversation of her neighbor and associates.

Joshua Humble listened gravely and in silence to his former housekeeper's recital, and when she had concluded he said:

"This is important, Katie—very important, and may furnish a clew to a speedy solution of this dreadful mystery. It is possible that William Barnes was murdered, for as you know, there was no post-

mortem examination of his remains, it being taken for granted that he died of heart disease as he had been under medical treatment for that malady for several years. But if he was murdered, George Langdon is guiltless of the crime, and Barnes was the victim of a conspiracy against his life and fortune. As for the girl, whom these women believe to be the daughter of Aurelia, her identity may be easily established if even one-tenth part of what these gossips say concerning her be true." As he followed her to the door and kindly took her hand in parting he added: "Do not mention this subject to anyone. It is important that the fact that you having overheard this conversation should not be known."

About eight o'clock on the following morning, Joshua Humble appeared at the office of Sol. Miserleugh dressed, not in his usual business suit of coarse material, but in a handsome suit of Scotch tweed, new glistening silk hat of the best quality and style, and brown English melton great coat, with fur muffler and gloves of otter skin. These articles had been presented to him by his loving old sister and little Alice, jointly, on his return from his interview with Judge Prye on the previous Saturday night, and represented the savings of years, penny by penny, of the two loving donors—saved for that very purpose—the purchase of that identical suit of clothes, to be presented to him on that day, the glorious day of his emancipation!

It was ten o'clock, and the great bell in the lofty tower of a church a few squares distant was solemnly tolling the hour, as Joshua Humble stepped into the sitting room of his home that memorable Saturday night, and, much to his surprise, found little Alice sitting in her willow rocker before the fire, her large eyes wide open and very bright, holding in her arms her favorite dolly arrayed in the new dress which her good auntie had made during her grandpa's absence. She had not heard him enter the hall from the street and therefore her first intimation of his return was the sound of the opening door as he entered the sitting room. Turning quickly, she beheld her grandpa standing just within the doorway, with his hand still on the knob, and with joyous cry she sprang toward him, and was enfolded in his arms. His good sister sat still in her easy chair on the opposite side of the fire and smiled, as only she could smile, with more of heaven than earth in the expression of her lovely old face—so like the noble face of her brother, and after the first joyous greeting was over and little Alice had nestled her head upon his shoulder, with her arms clasped about his neck, Joshua Humble sat down by his sister's side and began to marvel about little Alice being able to remain awake, as the usual hour for her retirement was eight.

"But this is an unusual occasion, Joshua," re-

plied his sister, still smiling; "it is the beginning of a new life for us all."

"Yes," he said, and could say no more.

"And Alice has a little surprise for you," said his sister, looking aside to hide her tears.

"Oh yes, grandpa dear," said Alice, as she crept down out of his arms, and ran to the opposite side of the room where two chairs had been placed together with a snow-white counterpane thrown over them, "look here what Auntie, my dear good Auntie, has had made for you." Then with quick nervous hands she dashed the counterpane aside, and there, carefully folded upon the chairs lay the suit of clothing, in the making of which an expert tailor had been employed. The scene which followed is indescribable: the joyous caperings of little Alice as she brought the articles of clothing one by one and placed them on her grandpa's knees, for his inspection; his tremulous responses to her questions while tears coursed down his face; the silent joyful weeping of his loving sister who had been unable to rise from her chair to assist little Alice in the presentation of the gifts. Finally, when the two old people had, in a measure, regained their usual calmness, little Alice succeeded in her efforts to induce her grandpa to try on the clothing, and, much to the gratification of all of them, the fit was perfect.

"Ah, how beautiful you are now! and how great and grand you look!" exclaimed the child gleefully,

clapping her tiny hands and stepping backward to obtain a better view of him; and then after a moment's hesitation, she ran to him and placing one of her hands in his and the other upon his arm, she looked up into his face tenderly and added in a low emotional voice: "but I love you, Grandpa, in your old worn clothes just as dearly as in the new."

And thus it happened that Joshua Humble was enabled that Monday morning to appear at Sol. Miserleigh's office in that handsome new suit of clothes, much to the astonishment of his employer, who at first glance wholly failed to recognize him, and who was so surprised by Mr. Humble's wonderful transformation that, for some moments, he was speechless with amazement. Finally, however, he found voice, but it was not of that rasping insolent tone in which he had so long been accustomed to address the majestic man who stood calmly before him, but it was in a pleasing deferential voice that he said:

"Ah, Mr. Humble, I must congratulate you on your improved—your greatly improved appearance. That is just as it should be."

"Simply the first movement in putting off the old and taking on the new," was the quiet dignified answer.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Humble, you see I have a man already in your old position," pointing over his shoulder with the thumb of his right hand to the tall desk where a long, lank, withered individual was

perched upon a high stool bending over an account book and industriously scratching away upon it with a steel pen. "A Mr. Grubb—ahem! here are some papers for you to look over and dispose of at your leisure Mr. Humble, and here are the keys to your desk."

With a polite bow, so like his old self, Mr. Humble took the papers and keys from the hands of Sol. Miserleigh, went quietly to his desk, opened it, sat down and at once proceeded to examine the papers.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ELASTIC CONSCIENCE SCOURGED BY ITS OWN GUILT.

Thus began Joshua Humble's first day of labor as a free man, and he applied himself to the performance of his new duties with the same patient earnestness as he had done in the days of his bondage, in the performance of the duties of a mortgaged menial. He was simply doing his whole duty—honestly earning the money which he expected to receive in compensation for his services. During the forenoon while Sol. Miserleigh was temporarily absent from the office, a young man whom Mr. Humble had observed standing on the pavement in front of the office looking wistfully in at the window, entered the office hurriedly and approaching Mr. Humble's desk, handed him a sealed addressed envelope, saying merely: "This is for you sir," and immediately departed. When Joshua Humble broke the seal, great was his surprise to find that the envelope contained a Stock Exchange certificate of membership in his name, of recent date, and the following scribbled in a cramped handwriting on a scrap of wrapping paper:

"Dear Friend, Joshua Humble—The enclosed

certificate is from the man whom you befriended when he had no friends on this side of the ocean, and no money. Accept this as a gift from me, not only as a token of my gratitude to you, for your generous kindness to me when there was nothing for you to gain thereby, but of my faithful friendship for you, and my earnest desire to contribute in some degree to your future success and happiness which I pray God to send to you speedily.

Gratefully and faithfully yours,

L. Vincent De Baun."

"What an honest, faithful and grateful soul!" said Mr. Humble as he folded up the letter and its enclosure, returned them to the envelope and put it in his pocket.

"Did you speak to me sir?" inquired Mr. Grubb, turning around on his high stool.

"No, Mr. Grubb, I was only thinking aloud," replied Joshua Humble glancing around at the long lank form upon the stool and smiling, as for the first time he observed that peculiar individual's ridiculous make up. He was indeed a most comical appearing person. His face was long and thin, his nose was long and large and very red, his eyes were small and bright, or at least so was the one visible, and little tuft of wiry blonde beard about three inches in length grew upon the extreme point of his peaked chin; over his left eye suspended by a string around his head, was a flap of dark green oil cloth and his hair, which was fiery red, and about one inch in

length stood literally on ends. Mr. Humble's smile broadened as he gazed upon that singular creature, and as he did not wish to laugh in the man's face, he turned around to his desk to resume his labors.

"Ahem! What do you think of my make up anyhow?" inquired Mr. Grubb as he slipped down from his stool and glided over to Mr. Humble's side. "My hair is colored and so is my nose, and this patch over my eye is not at all necessary for that optic is as good as its mate, and these whiskers are merely stuck on with wax—and lastly my name is not Grubb."

"Well then, who are you, and why are you masquerading in that fashion?" demanded Mr. Humble sternly, as he swung around in his chair.

"Hush! not so loud Mr. Humble, if you please," was the quick reply. I am here at the instance of Judge Prye, so that the criminal may not escape. It is necessary for me to enlighten you on the subject, that is all," and he returned to his desk and climbed up on his stool, and not a moment too soon, for he had not written a dozen words before Sol. Miserleigh entered the office.

At noon precisely, Joshua Humble closed his desk, arose from his chair, put on his great coat and hat, went out upon the pavement and sauntered leisurely down the street until he came to an old and popular restaurant which he entered, sat down at a table and ordered his dinner, just as he had done twenty-

five years before on that very day of the month and the same month of the year, the last day of his freedom, and which he had done on every business day for many years previous to that time. As he sat waiting for his dinner to be served he glanced around the room to note the changes which had taken place during the long period of his absence. The room and its arrangement were apparently unchanged; the tables, the chairs, the dishes and cutlery, and even the servants seemed perfectly familiar to him, although he well knew that those who had served him there in the days of his prosperity had long since gone away, and many of them long since dead and forgotten. But as he glanced over at the office, there at his desk sat the old proprietor, but little changed—only grown a trifle heavier and grayer but still fresh and rosy as in the days of the long ago. While these thoughts were passing through his mind the servant came with his dinner, and at that moment also Sol. Miserleigh entered the room and observing Mr. Humble he stopped short, evidently greatly surprised. He could account for Mr. Humble's new suit of clothes and forgive him therefor, but a dinner at the price of one dollar! that was too much for him to comprehend on such short notice. However, after his shock of astonishment had somewhat subsided, Sol. Miserleigh bowed to Mr. Humble and sat down at a table on the opposite side of the room and in a low voice ordered his

dinner. While he was waiting for it he glanced at Mr. Humble from the corner of his eye and observed him eating in the manner of a cultured gentleman, and evidently with great satisfaction, and a fierce tempest of jealous anger raged in his heart.

"He is evidently far beyond my grasp. At a single bound he has passed the limits of my power and influence and now scornfully defies me. He is indeed a wonderful man, powerful in both mind and body, and henceforth will be to me a constant source of danger. While he lives I shall never be safe even a single moment. Why have I delayed so long? Curses on my cowardice! Why do I tremble with fear in his presence and can scarcely refrain from getting down on my knees to him?" The waiter came with his dinner and he began to eat—more like a beast than a human, as indeed beast he was, dipping into the food with his fingers and gnawing and crunching the bones like a famished dog. He was endeavoring to get the full value of his dollar!

While Miserleigh was in the midst of his dinner Joshua Humble arose from the table, sauntered leisurely to the office counter, paid for his dinner, exchanged a few pleasant words with the proprietor who instantly recognized and warmly congratulated him, and then Mr. Humble passed out upon the street. As he walked slowly along with the dignified bearing and leisure of a gentleman of opulence, his old and natural manner, he met several of his former

business acquaintances and accepted their kind greetings and congratulations with the ease and grace of one who receives what is justly his due, and yet with a kidly and delicate appreciation of the same. At one o'clock Mr. Humble entered the Stock Exchange and was immediately recognized by the older members who gathered around and congratulated him warmly on his reappearance there as a member, and freely offered him pecuniary assistance to enable him to operate again on his own account. To all, he gave the same answer:

"Not now, my good friends, not now, but after a time when I can fully grasp the new order of business. You must remember that in a business sense I have been sleeping a quarter of a century and therefore, in that relation, I am a veritable Rip Van Winkle."

While Joshua Humble was the center of interest and attraction for all of the older and many of the newer members of the exchange, Sol. Miserleigh entered and beholding Mr. Humble surrounded by and receiving the congratulations of all of the more wealthy members present, his astonishment was beyond limit or measure. At the first glance he comprehended the situation and paused as though undecided whether to retreat precipitately, or to boldly advance and brave the trying ordeal which he knew awaited him in the form of sneers and scornful glances from all those who knew the history of

Joshua Humble's downfall and humiliation. Finally he chose the middle course, and went sneaking around, attending to his business here and there, with this person and then with that person, and all in nervous haste as though fleeing from some frightful danger, with every limb shackled. His mind was a steed in flight at its utmost speed and his guilty conscience was its pitiless rider, urging it onward with the whip and spur of vengeance through a mental night of storm and darkness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

PUTTING TOGETHER THIS AND THAT.

A mysterious and startling rumor came from the lowest level of society and echoed through the various grades thereof, until it reached the upper circles where it buzzed into every ear and echoed from every lip. It was an accusation against a mere boy, who, as the story ran, had fled from the city immediately after the commission of the crime—the murder of his uncle by poisoning. But, strange though it may seem, nevertheless it is true, that nobody, even of the lowest social level believed for one moment that George Langdon was guilty of the crime, while none doubted that William Barnes had been murdered, notwithstanding the verdict of the physicians that his death was occasioned by heart disease. Therefore when the rumor reached police headquarters through a burley Irish policeman who had heard it in a low grogshop on the Levee, the chief leaned back in his chair, took the cigar from his mouth, blew a pearly cloud of smoke above his head and laughingly replied:

“Nonsense—nonsense McGinnis, that’s old, very

aged indeed—mere rot! I investigated that fishwoman's gossip, and know that there is nothing in it except the possibility that William Barnes was poisoned. As for Langdon being guilty of the crime that idea is absolutely absurd. Why, Mack, he had not been at home for two weeks previous to the death of Barnes. He had been dissipating a little and being a 'tenderfoot' in that line was ashamed to go home and face his uncle, who had been informed concerning some of his trifling irregularities. So you see at once that that part of the story is absolutely false; and now all that remains to be considered is its origin. Ahem! let me see a—h, Sol. Miserleigh! Why he should originate and circulate that cock and bull story and especially to that old fishwoman is what knocks me silly. Ah—ha! unless—ahem! You may go now McGinnis, it's all bosh!" and as the officer waddled out of the room the captain rocked back in his chair, put his feet on top of his desk, gazed at the ceiling intently, twisted his nose with the fingers of his left hand, wrinkled his brow thoughtfully and in a low tone gave utterance to his meditations in these words:

"Sol. Miserleigh—whew! Why didn't I think of that before? I beleive I've struck a lead. He first told the story to the old fishwoman with strict injunction not to tell who told her, but with permission to scatter the lie broadcast among the gossips. To presume that Sol. Miserleigh had no special motive in the invention and circulation of the slander

against young Langdon would be ridiculously absurd, for the villainous old rascal is always frightfully in earnest and hews straight to the line. Furthermore, he is a skillful strategist and works his schemes by indirection and when he fixed the crime upon young Langdon and endeavored to use against him the fact of his departure from the city on the morning of his uncle's death, it was but the shadow of a deep laid scheme in which he himself was the prime actor. What that scheme is—its character and motive remains for Grubb to discover, and we can only watch and wait and weave our snare as the thread of circumstance is reeled off to us straight and strong from the tangled skein of facts. That William Barnes was poisoned to death was ascertained beyond doubt by the autopsy of his remains yesterday. It seemed cruel to drag the poor fellow from his grave, and carve him up, but this ugly rumor rendered an investigation necessary, and thus the truth was brought to light."

At that moment the Coroner and the Judge of the Criminal Court in their respective offices, and Judge Prye in his library at his home, were indulging in the same train of reflection, and Joshua Humble and Mr. Grubb were each silently employed with their respective office duties, and Sol. Miserleigh stood at the counter of the telegraph office writing this message to Sam Slick, namely:

"Fix Langdon safe and come here immediately for conference."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

STARTLING INFORMATION BY AMOS THE FOX.

With nervous haste and trembling hands he scribbled the words with the stump of a pencil upon a telegraph blank, prepared the message to Sam Slick and hurried away. His face was flushed and his eyes bloodshot and as he ambled along the crowded thoroughfare, he reeled like one under the influence of an intoxicant. He moved along, first on the right and then on the left side of the pavement, now endeavoring to stem the human tide flowing in the opposite direction and being buffeted and cast aside like a floating log at the head of an eddy in a swift flowing river, and then gliding along with the current, in and out, here and there, shivering, panting, crouching as in great mental anguish and excitement, as though endeavoring to escape observation, as though fleeing in hot haste from the presence of a just and relentless avenger.

He had just heard the rumor which had been floating over the city: the ugly rumor concerning the cause of the death of William Barnes, and he instantly perceived that he had sown a gentle breeze.

of suspicion only to reap a terrible tempest of accusation which threatened the utter destruction of its creator, leaving all else unharmed. The rumor had been brought to him on the street, by Amos the Fox, who by signs, drew him into an unfrequented alleyway, and in nervous haste told him the story in minute details and also communicated the additional information, that by direction of the Judge of the criminal court the body of William Barnes had been secretly exhumed and examined by the coroner, aided by skillful physicians, resulting in the discovery that death was occasioned by poison. This latter information Amos the Fox had just obtained from a servant of the coroner, who was present at, and assisted in the autopsy—a new recruit and outside member of the gang of rogues of which Hairlip Brown was the chief. All this was news to Sol. Miserleigh as he had not heard even the rumored accusation against George Langdon with which his own name was associated in connection with those of the fishwoman, and the “Three Graces of Satan,” and he was speechless with amazement, and stricken with terror, and before he could command his voice to answer, Amos the Fox had hurried away and disappeared amid the crowd of people on the street, hurrying homeward to rest from the toils and vexations of the day.

For ten minutes Sol. Miserleigh paced up and down the dark alleyway utterly bewildered and un-

nerved. His usual insolent aggressiveness and self-confidence had entirely vanished, the ground seemed to be sinking beneath his feet, and visions of prison and gallows floated across his brain. Two cold dead faces—those of the father and son whom he had murdered, seemed to be pressed against his own, and each with an arm clasped about his neck, seemed to be endeavoring to drag him down into the awful chasm which was opening beneath his feet. Ten minutes longer he paced to and fro, moaning and blaspheming, and then, having in a measure regained his composure, he passed out of the alleyway and down the street to the telegraph office where he wrote the message to Sam Slick. It was nearly six o'clock when Sol. Miserleigh entered his office. Joshua Humble had gone home and Mr. Grubb, having put away his books and lighted the gas, was perched upon his stool awaiting his employer's return.

"Go!" said Miserleigh roughly, nodding his head impatiently toward Mr. Grubb and pointing with the thumb of his left hand over his shoulder toward the door. Mr. Grubb did not require the second invitation to lay down his burden of toil, nor did he love his master sufficiently to wish to remain in his presence one moment more than necessary, and hence he obeyed with alacrity.

Five minutes Sol. Miserleigh stood still in the center of his office looking down upon the floor and

breathing heavily. Like a general in battle surrounded by his enemies and upon the point of capture, he was thinking—planning a bold dash for safety and liberty. Finally, with a sigh of relief, he removed his gloves and thrust them into the pockets of his great coat, went to his desk, opened his secret drawer, took from it a large roll of bank notes, closed and locked his desk, turned out the gas, passed out upon the street, locked the office door and hurried away. Half an hour later he entered the second-hand clothing store of Jacob Blum where he found the old Jew walking the floor in nervous haste, and evidently in great mental distress.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

PARTING OF CONSPIRATORS.

"Come," said Miserleigh to Jacob Blum nodding his head toward the door.

"Vere?" queried Jacob tremulously.

"To the warehouse," and without another word Miserleigh turned and walked out upon the street followed by Blum.

They walked rapidly in silence ten squares when Jacob touched Miserleigh's arm and said:

"Ve vas in a dight blace und you makes all de droubles yourself by talking mit dat fishwoman."

"Yes, cursed idiot that I was. I only intended to render the boy's return impossible. I was afraid that Sam Slick would go back on me—the tender-hearted booby—but I overreached myself and now I will have to strain every nerve to stem the tide which is setting strong against me. However—money will do anything, and I have resolved to use it freely. We must carry out our original intentions concerning Sam Slick and Joshua Humble and must add to the list that miserable old snoop, Judge Prye. Before he is done with me he will learn to his sorrow

that it is neither wise nor safe to pry into my business affairs; we must kidnap—kill—anything to get them out of the way, and I shall depend upon you to do your part. Do you know that the authorities have exhumed the body of William Barnes and ascertained the fact that he was poisoned?" .

"Nein!" replied the Jew in a frightened voice, stopping short while his face blanched, and he began to shiver like one with an ague.

"Yes, come on! don't stop—every moment is precious!" and seizing the trembling Jew by the arm Sol. Miserleigh hurried him along, and twenty minutes later they entered the enclosure used by Blum for the storage of old iron. After carefully reconnoitering the place to be sure that no enemy lurked therein, they descended into the old cistern, groped through the passageway, clambered up the ladder into the yard of the warehouse, found the basement door and gave the usual signal. A faint light gleamed through the keyhole, but to their surprise there was no response to their summons and no sound within. Again old Jacob rapped the signal sharply upon the door, with the same result as before, and finally in his impatience he seized the knob and rattled it violently, when the door sprung ajar, and they pushed it open and entered the room.

A lamp was burning dimly on a table; a few lumps of burning coal were smouldering in the grate, but there was no living soul within. As old

Jacob closed the door, Sol. Miserleigh walked over and turned up the light and there upon the table before him lay an envelope addressed in the bold round handwriting of Hairlip Brown: "To M. or B." With trembling fingers he broke the seal and drew forth the letter and as old Jacob hastened to his side Sol. Miserleigh read in a low tone the following:

5:30 p. m.

"The cops are on to us and the jig is up. At seven o'clock we will be fifty miles from the city and will not return. Get away from here the moment you read this or you will be gobbled and run in. The whole scheme has been discovered by the slopping over of a fool's mouth."

"Come, let us go," said Miserleigh tremulously as he threw the letter upon the fire and turned out the light.

"Yaw, hurry!" responded Jacob impatiently as they passed out and softly closed the door. At a street corner half a square distant from the warehouse, Blum and Miserleigh parted in silence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN IGNOMINIOUS BANISHMENT.

It lacked a quarter of ten o'clock when Sol. entered the front door of his home, having gone there direct from his office where he had transacted important legal business. A single gas jet was burning dimly in the hall, and without pausing to remove his coat or hat he passed on into the dining room where he found his mother seated in a low willow rocker bending over a feeble sputtering fire in the grate. At that instant, the storm which had been gathering in the heavens all the afternoon, swept furiously over the city, and the rattle of the rain droops upon the slate roof, and the rush of the wind around the sharp angles of the building, created a unison of sounds dismal in the extreme.

A storm had also been brewing in the home of Sol. Miserleigh that afternoon—a tempest of human rage more violent and terrible than the conflict of elements without—and the two storms began at the same moment. That day Mrs. Miserleigh had heard the rumor for the first time.

As Sol. closed the door behind him, his mother

put down the poker with which she had been punching the reluctant fire, arose from her chair, advanced and confronted him in the middle of the room and demanded sternly: "Why are you here?"

Her face was white as marble and her lips were tightly drawn, revealing at full length those frightful protruding jagged teeth. Sol. was silent. Her terrible vehement anger overwhelmed him with fear, and he turned his face aside because he could not endure the blinding glare of her wicked eyes.

"Why are you here?" she again demanded in a sharp, fierce tone, like the snarl of an enraged tigress, while flecks of foam came forth from between her thin and bloodless lips. "Idiot! Dolt! Scoundrell! Murderer! Liar! Do you know that at this moment you are in the very jaws of death, almost within the grasp of the law? Don't you know that your vile mouthing to a low fisherwoman has brought you swiftly to the end which you so richly deserve?"

"Yes, I know—I know all," he replied in a faint tremulous voice. "I know that the end has come, and not only to me but also to you, for you are the author of all my misery and crime. If I am heartless, false and vile, you made me so and therefore you are the real criminal, and I but the faithful creature of your will."

"Yes," she replied, "that is true, too, but you are an accursed Barnes and deserve no better fate! The man whom you murdered one night over by

the lake yonder was your own father! When I was a mere child he wronged me and you are the fruit of that wrong. When you were born I hid you away in a poor family of many children in an obscure village and two years afterward I married Miserleigh who lived but three years; then I came to this city with you and Aurelia and you know the rest. Now go, and put as many miles as possible between yourself and this city before daylight, or you will never enjoy another day of liberty! Go!" and she pushed him rudely toward the door. "Go!" and she grasped him by the arm and hurried him along the hall, and out into the vestibule, opened the front door and violently thrust him out into the night and storm.

At that moment a strong gust of wind wrenched the door from her grasp and swung it violently shut. "It is an omen," she said as she turned the key in the lock and slipped the bolt forward into its socket. "Even the elements conspire to thrust him forth, and he will never cross this threshold again." Then she turned and passed through the vestibule, locked the inner door, returned to the dining room, resumed her seat before the fire, leaned her elbows on her knees, covered her face with her hands and wept. It was a storm of grief as violent as her anger a few moments before, and as she swayed to and fro in her chair her moaning was pitiful in the extreme.

"Gone! gone! forever gone! and the darkness of death settling down upon my soul!" These were

her words in pitiful, tremulous accents, and more, many more in faint whispers, as the night wore on, while the rain beat furiously upon the roof and dashed against the windows. Finally as the hands of the clock on the mantel pointed to twelve and its bell slowly chimed the hour, she straightened up in her chair, wiped the tears from her face, clasped her hands together upon her lap and gazed intently upon the last glowing ember in the grate as it settled slowly down and melted away into ashes.

When the clock chimed "one," she arose from her chair, took writing material from the mantel, sat down by the table, and for five minutes wrote rapidly, having evidently thought the whole matter out while sitting by the fire and gazing at the dying embers. At length with a sigh she put down the pen, folded the sheet of paper on which she had written, placed it in an envelope and addressed it: "To whom it may concern." Then she arose, put out the light and went directly to the room of Aurelia in the tower, which she entered softly. In the dim light of a single gas jet in a chandelier of five large burners, Mrs. Miserleigh paused by the bedside of Aurelia and listened. The poor soul was sleeping soundly and a sweet smile rested upon her face—lovely in its calm repose. She was evidently dreaming—doubtless of her children and her husband, and in fancy she was living over again the only joyous hours of all her life. Bending down,

Mrs. Miserleigh kissed the fair warm face of her daughter and whispered: "Sleep on, poor demented soul, to whom life has been only a torture and death will be a joyous emancipation! Sleep on until you awake in the presence of your loved one in the other world. Oh, Aurelia! how I have wrecked your pure young life—I, your own mother, who never since my first mad love, loved ought but you! But fate so ordered and I have been only the instrument for the accomplishment of its purpose. Good-bye Aurelia! good-bye forever! I am vile and you are pure, and we shall never meet in the other world!" For several minutes she stood looking down upon the calm, beautiful face of her daughter, and then she drew a large willow rocker close by the bedside, turned out the light and then turned the thumb screws of all of the five burners so that the gas would flow with its full force into the room. Then she sat down in the chair, leaned her head backward, folded her arms across her bosom, closed her eyes and gently sank into eternal sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

VULGAR PLUTOCRACY.

During their brief sojourn in the city to which they had gone at the suggestion of Sol. Miserleigh, George Langdon and Paul Dyke had been very pleasantly employed. They had taken long carriage drives through the fashionable residence portion of the city and often going at considerable distances into the country; they had strolled through the beautiful parks, had attended many nice places of amusement, and in their cosy apartments at the hotel where they had remained since the night of their arrival they had experienced great pleasure in each others society; and also during that time they had formed many agreeable acquaintances through the social aggressiveness of Paul Dyke who smiled and chatted with everybody with whom he came in contact and had always at his tongue's end, pleasant words, even for the servants. Hence, he soon became immensely popular about the hotel and his fame as a gentleman of elegant manners and interesting characteristics spread abroad, and the rumor ran hither and thither, until finally he became an interesting subject of con-

versation in the upper circles of extreme fashionable society which might be properly termed shoddyocracy.

The rotunda of the hotel was a popular lounging place for the males of that class of people known as "swells"—fellows of large financial resources and very small mental endowments, and its parlors were favorite places of resort for the former's feminine counterpart.

By chance, while promenading the hotel corridor of the floor on which his apartments were located, to walk off a little of his surplus energy, Paul Dyke met a dainty little woman tripping lightly toward him, followed by a dainty little poodle dog with silken snow white hair and pink eyes, decorated with a baby blue silk ribbon around its neck to which was suspended a chime of silver bells which jingled merrily as it ran. The aforesaid dainty little lady was none other than Miss M. Marie Whiffle, (formerly plain Mehetable Mary) daughter of a millionaire ex-soap maker, which fact, the character of the business whereby her father amassed his immense fortune, probably accounted for her extreme neatness and cleanliness, as she was born amid the stifling odors of boiling soap, and therefore the irresistible desire to be eternally scrubbing her person was doubtless but the effect upon her mind of early constant association with the chemical ingredients necessary to produce cleanliness.

As the diminutive female approached Paul Dyke, he lifted his glistening silk hat, smiled and bowed with courtly grace, and in pleasing acknowledgment of the courtesy, Miss Whiffle bowed, smiled, blushed and passed on into the parlor, while Paul Dyke continued his promenade, wondering why on earth women were ever constructed upon the fragile and fraudulent plan of which Miss Whiffle was a true representative.

"She is not larger than a twelve-year-old child, and yet she is not less than twenty-five," he muttered, as with hands clasped behind his back, and head erect, he resumed his promenade. "And, furthermore, there are many evidences of unreality about her—of manufactured beauty and voluptuousness—a bleached, washed-out appearance combined with a stifling odor of starch, soap and cologne. I'll bet—no I wont do anything of the kind; I wont bet, for I've sworn off—but I'll guarantee—oh, guarantee is good, that's the word! I'll guarantee, then, that she lisps and titters and simpers and uses all of the swell slang and writes spring poetry and reads novels that would corrupt an angel; that she is insanely passionate and romantic and quick to engage in any sort of adventure that may promise excitement or pleasure. Though extremely prudish and fastidious in public, she is vulgar and reckless in private, and though wealthy, and cultured by the hot-bed process of education and experience, she is of

plebian origin of the lowest degree, and to conclude that her father amassed his fortune in the scavenger business would be a very natural and doubtless correct presumption. Still, I must endeavor to cultivate her acquaintance and thereby obtain entrance to the peculiar circle of society of which she is a correct representative. I need a little practice in that particular sphere to complete my education of experience. I have lived in the gutters among the human pigs of that social level, and never got down to wallow with them in the mire of debauchery and crime. I have hob-nobbed with blue bloods for years and been counted as one of their set, and did not acquire their vices, but I have never had any experience with the shoddy variety of uppertendom and I cannot afford to neglect the present opportunity."

As he walked and thought and smiled and gazed at the fresco work on the ceiling, he suddenly became aware of an approaching human form, and turning quickly, he was confronted at close quarters by a little active man whom he immediately recognized as W. Potter Stunner, to whom he had been introduced on the previous day in the hotel rotunda by the obliging chief clerk of the house, who bowed very gracefully between them and placed the index finger of his left hand against his own shirt front in close proximity to his diamond pin, as he repeated their names severally and then in turn patted them

upon the shoulder with his disengaged hand and assured them that they were "birds of the same feather."

"Awh, Misto Dwyke—awh, sah, I bweg youh pawdon—awh! But how do youth pwospah this awf-tanoon?" said W. Potter Stunner with a low bow and a pretty little courtesy as he lifted his cunning little derby hat and disclosed his round little head covered with silken blonde curls.

"I prosper well indeed—thank you, Mr. Stunner," replied Paul Dyke, smiling.

"Awh, glad to heah it Misto Dwyke, vewy glad indeed—awh! But have youh seen Miss M. Marie Whiffle paws along the hall wecently—awh?"

"I have not the honor of the lady's acquaintance, and consequently am unable to reply to your question definitely, but I presume the lady you seek entered the parlor a few moments ago."

"Awh, she was amall?"

"Very smmall."

"And vewy pwetty?"

"Quite interesting."

"And stylish?"

"Very stylish indeed."

"And has bwown eyes?"

"The same."

"And curly blonde hair?"

"Beautiful blonde curls."

"That's M. Marie Whiffle! I must haste to join
[17].

her. I bweg pwadon—awh, Misto Dwyke—I bid you good day!” and the dapper dandy bowed and courtesied again and moved on with a hop and a skip and entered the parlor twirling his little derby hat nervously in his hands, while Paul Dyke continued his promenade, muttering disgustedly: “Two of a kind and a very amusing pair. Ah me! what were such creatures ever created for?”

George Langdon opened the door of his apartment, and approaching Paul Dyke began to express his dissatisfaction with a book which he had been reading, when W. Potter Stunner emerged from the parlor, and approaching them with a playful little hop and skip, courtesied before them, adjusted his monocle, elevated his chin until his nose pointed toward the edge of the ceiling, stared vacantly a moment at Paul Dyke and then turned and stared at Langdon in the same manner, and finally with another and even prettier bow and courtesy opened his mouth and gurgled:

“Awh, Misto Langdon—awh sah! delighted to meet you again sah, Misto Dwyke I believe youh said a few moments ago—awh, that you ahad nevah been itwoded to Miss M. Marie Whiffle—awh?” Eh?”

“Yes, Mr. Stunner, I made that statement.”

“Awh. And you, Misto Langdon?”

“I have never been honored by the lady’s acquaintance.”

"Awh. Gentlemen, you must pwemit me to pwesent you to her now, if agweeable to you."

"With pleasure," they both replied as they glanced significantly at each other, and were immediately ushered into the parlor where they were introduced to Miss Whiffle and also to a half score of other females of her kind. A spirited and vivacious conversation ensued and was continued a quarter of an hour, and then Paul Dyke and George Langdon politely withdrew, leaving W. Potter Stunner and the females chattering like magpies, with decided ultra foreign accentuation.

CHAPTER XL.

A CARNIVAL OF SHODDYITES.

The following morning Paul Dyke and George Langdon were the recipients of elegant and strongly perfumed invitations to a ball and banquet to be given at a "swell" club house in the city, and accordingly, at the hour designated, they were in attendance, and with much ado were introduced to the company, and at once became the center of attraction, and for the moment the leading sensation. One of the last of the guests to arrive, was Count Von Schultzenblocken, whose name indicated very noble and ancient ancestry. He was tall and painfully thin and his feet and hands were broad and long. His slim neck, which terminated in the rear in a sharp peak at the top of his head, resembled strikingly the neck of a giraffe, while his forehead began at his eyebrows and sloped backward at an angle of forty-five degrees, terminating at the front base of the peak, on the top of his head, with barely three inches of coarse gray-black hair, intervening between the upward termination of the forehead and the summit of the aforesaid peak. His eyes were

small and wide apart, and into one of them was wedged a single eye glass, very large and glittering. His nose was of rainbow form and of extremely florid color, and at the lower extremity it was flattened and spread outward, covering a large portion of his upper lip, which was adorned by a long coarse black mustache waxed at the ends and curled upward a la Napoleon. His mouth was wide and sinister and his chin retreated so precipitously that his face seemed to be wholly devoid of that feature, the neck appearing to terminate upward at his lower lip. His speech was a mixture of the whirring accent of the Swiss, the guttural of the German and the peculiar nasal twang of the French. But Lord bless you! his name was very imposing, and his title attractive, and those two important considerations completely obliterated the great multitude of his physical and intellectual defects. His step was measured and spasmodic, like that of a horse with the springhalt, and his bearing was lofty to the very point of grandeur. To the females, his physical peculiarities (with title included) constituted a new and interesting type of beauty, and in his presence they smiled and simpered, and put forth their best efforts to attract his attention, and to win his admiration. On the other hand, Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth, was calm, collected and self-possessed and prosecuted his matter of money conquest with the methodical precision of a mathematician solving a difficult prob-

lem. The focus of his magnified eye seemed to be continually fixed upon the ceiling in close examination of the fresco work, to which he seemed to address his rasping gradiloquent words, intended as responses to the compliments of the bevy of female admirers who clustered around him. Occasionally, however, he would suspend his examination of the ceiling and slowly lower his gaze until the rugged peak of his cranium attained an upright position and his nose pointed toward the floor, and then with a slow sweep of his magnified eye around the circle of pretty upturned anxious faces, he would bow and prance like a victorious rooster in a barnyard, among a group of admiring hens.

As to the other males in attendance, with the exception of Dyke and Langdon, they were simply green-eyed with jealousy. Being left wholly to the entertainment of a number of wallflowers of doubtful ages and angular forms, their indignation was simply inexpressable; and a hundred angry eyes glared at him through a hundred single eye glasses; and a hundred noses were pointed at him like so many interrogation points; and a thousand fingers were clenched and deeply buried into the palms of two hundred hands; and a hundred mouths of as many males in attendance hissed forth in hoarse whispers, deep and damning imprecations upon the head of the lofty and scornful scion of nobility.

It was clearly apparent that the most ardent and

avored worshiper at the shrine of Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth, was M. Marie Whiffle, whose father had died, leaving to her a goodly portion of his immense estate, and hence the alleged Count, with a shrewd brain and a keen eye to business, had decided to annex her hand and fortune to his moneyless alleged title, and in evidence of his settled purpose in that relation, he drew her arm within the sharp bony crook of his own and clung to her tenaciously, while she in turn, in evidence of her entire satisfaction with the Count's decision, clung to his skeleton crook with both of her hands as though fearful that he might escape from her grasp and bear away from her forever the alleged title which she hoped to purchase with her clean and perfumed person, and her immense fortune.

And it was also clearly apparent that W. Potter Stunner, who was deeply enamored of M. Marie Whiffle, and whose fortune and credit had been totally wrecked by his senseless extravagance, was the most indignant individual in the assembly, and he could scarcely repress his rage when he beheld the titled usurper leering grossly into the face of the woman he idolized. And so he paced the floor and bit his lips and nursed his anger and longed for revenge, though he knew not that it was coming with swift and steady sweep, of its own free will and motion.

CHAPTER XLI.

A BEWILDERING "HOP."

Paul Dyke and George Langdon watched Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth, strutting and swaggering around among his silly female admirers, and each to the other whispered witty comments and enjoyed the scene immensely. Finally, the band struck up a march and the company in pairs, male and female, began to promenade—Paul Dyke and George Longdon among them, each with a simpering woman clinging to his arm, awing and bandying swell slang and state compliments, until at length the music changed to a waltz, and away they whirled like the spokes of a wheel in rapid motion. Every where the single eye glass glittered, and diamonds flashed from ears and shirt bosoms, and tall white collars, stiff and rigid as sheet iron, girdled the necks of the males, and cut deep furrows into their retreating chins, and soft creamy laces and brilliant silk robes fluttered around female forms.

Away they floated, round and round, here and there, up and down, until the room seemed to them like a great round plain in rapid circling motion and

the lights like myriads of far off meteors flashing athwart a moonless sky. It was a scene of grotesque comicality, a grave and earnest burlesque, a sober, mournful farce, in which Count Von Schultenblocken was the star performer, and M. Marie Whiffle the female leader in his support.

Finally, in the very midst of the wild whirl and excitement of the waltz, Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth and W. Potter Stunner came into violent collision with each other, and instantly each parted company with his female companion and went sprawling in opposite directions, with a swift hopping—skipping motion, ending in an ungraceful drop into a sitting posture and a rapid glide backward along the waxen floor. Finally, when stopped by the walls on opposite sides of the room, the two hostile rivals, arose to their feet—slowly and painfully—and began moving toward each other in the peculiar manner of fighting cooks going to battle. Though eager for the fray, they did not meet, because they could not by reason of the solid wall of people between them, and they could only stand on opposite sides of the obstruction and gnash their teeth the growl. The ladies, almost unanimously, united in earnest expressions of sympathy for the Count, and innocently appeared not to observe the gaping rent in one knee of his trousers which he himself had not yet discovered.

It was a trying ordeal for the maidens to stand

thus, all unconscious of what, even the man in the moon could not have failed to observe through the clear plate glass window, but the sweet innocent little dears were fully equal to the requirements of the occasion, and calmed his angered soul with sweet spoken words of sympathy, while W. Potter Stunner was left alone to rub his bruises and console himself with the comfortable reflection that his limbs were unfractured and his garments whole.

Though decidedly sensational, the interruption was but brief and the music began again, and away the dancers whirled and continued to spin, until again the lights seemed to them like so many streaks of fire and the room like a swiftly moving circular space. At length the dance was finished and the music ceased, and Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth, escorted the panting and blushing Miss Whipple to a seat and bowed before her very courteously—but horror of horrors! while in that stooping position his magnified eye discovered the rent in his trousers, and with a half uttered compliment, which his paralyzed lips refused to finish, he turned and fled precipitately to the dressing room. As he entered therein with a flying leap like a sprinter passing under the wire at the end of the home stretch, a number of young men were in the act of correcting the parting of their thin hair, and in otherwise arranging their toilets, in which they were dexterously assisted by a wheezy little German, the servant in

charge of the apartment. When the horrified Von Schultz-and-so-forth came bounding into the room, the little German servant, who was in the act of brushing a coat, reeled backward until he came into contact with the opposite wall, threw up his hands in a gesture of astonishment, and exclaimed:

"Mine Gott! mine old friendt, Hans Schultz, ze pawn broker fon Metz."

"Pawn broker of Metz?" echoed the crowd in chorus.

"Sure!" responded the little German, "sure zhentlemens, mine old friendt, Hans Schultz, ze pawn broker fon Metz. His fodder vas a pawn proker und I know him since a ledle poy, forty year ago in Metz—Ah Hans!" he continued with outstretched hand toward the alleged Count, "ah Hans! how you do, mine old poyhood friendt?"

"Ah! Who? Oh! ejaculated the frightened Schultz—cowering backward as the litte German advanced, "ah! who—vat vas dat?" and he retreated through the open doorway far more hastily than he had entered the room, while the male guests hurried out also to spread the news among the females, and to rejoice together over the complete overthrow of their haughty and hated rival.

The stampede of Hans Schultz, alias Count Von Schultz-and-so-forth, was signal and complete. He rushed to the cloak room, snatched his cane, overcoat and hat rudely from the hands of the servant,

hurried down stairs to the pavement, sprang into his carriage and was driven rapidly away.

The banquet which followed the startling episode, was a gloomy and mournful affair. It was simply a funeral feast to the females who mourned inconsolably over fond vanished hopes, but to the males it was a season of delightful calm and peace after a fearful tempest of anger and humiliation—a happy, even joyous realization of complete victory, and they were too busy with their own pleasing thoughts to indulge in the senseless gossip usual with them on such occasions. Therefore, they too munched their food in silence, broken only by the jingle of silverware, the rattle of china and the shuffling of the servant's feet upon the polished floor.

At an early hour, carriages were ordered, and the guests departed for their homes as slowly and sadly as mourners return from a funeral, leaving the wheezy little German of the gentlemen's dressing room at the club house, explaining to a group of fellow servants, his sensational, though on his part, innocent expose of the true character of the titled fraud.

"Vy, Hans Schultz bees no count, an no noddings but a pawn proker," he said vehemently, and with a display of intense indignation when one of the servants suggested that he might have been mistaken concerning the man's identity. "No saire, no count! I know him vell since he vas sex year oldt und I

vas eight. His fodder vas a half Jew und his mudder vas a Swiss vomans, und ze old man kept a pawn proker shop in Metz, und ven ze old man died Hans kept ze shop un vas dere ven I coom to America four year ago. Count noddings; hump! He bees no Count at all—but only Hans Schultz, ze pawn proker fon Metz.”

CHAPTER XLII.

THE IMAGE OF A DEAD FRIEND REVEALED.

Paul Dyke and George Langdon were among the last of the guests to order their carriage, and during the journey of twenty minutes from the club house to their hotel, they discussed the comical and interesting incidents of the night and commented humorously upon the lofty bearing and the subsequent accidental unmasking of the bogus Count. They were still discussing the matter when they entered their apartments at the hotel, but as George Langdon turned up the gas light, Paul Dyke stopped short in the middle of a sentence as he observed upon the center table a telegram addressed to "Sam Slick." With a dazed expression of countenance, he took the envelope in his hand, broke the seal, drew forth the message and read the following:

"Fix Langdon safe, and come here immediately for conference.

"Sol. Miserleigh."

"What is it Paul, a love letter?" inquired Langdon carelessly as he punched the fire with a poker, sat down before it and held up his hands to the cheerful blaze.

"A telegram from Sol. Miserleigh," replied Paul; "read it my boy it is of interest to you also," and he held out the message to Langdon who took it, read it carefully twice and returned it to Paul with the inquiry uttered in an anxious tone. "What does it portend Paul, more trouble—Eh?"

Paul Dyke did not reply at once but paced the floor nervously a few minutes and then sat down by Langdon's side, grasped both his hands and silently gazed upon his fair young face.

"What is the matter, Paul? you tremble and seem greatly agitated," said Langdon. "Remember you are my trusted friend and should keep nothing from me which concerns my welfare. Do not keep me in suspense—do not treat me like a child, but tell me all—truly and frankly—all you know of Miserleigh's purposes concerning me."

"I will my dear boy," replied Dyke earnestly, "I will tell you now what I have shrunk from telling you heretofore from fear of creating suspicion in your mind concerning the quality and motives of my friendship for you. Every day since we came here, I have resolved to unmask Sol. Miserleigh to you, and as often my courage has failed me and I have hesitated from day to day until now. But at last the crisis, which I have dreaded so much—which I knew must come eventually, is upon us, and I can no longer delay the revelation, for I have never deceived you George, and I will not begin

to do so now." Taking a large wallet from the inside pocket of his vest, he opened it, drew forth a slip of paper, handed it to Langdon and said: "Read that, my dear boy, and you will know all."

With trembling hands George Langdon took the slip of paper from Paul Dyke, held it up to the light and read:

"Slick: This is a profitable customer and we must retain his patronage regardless of cost. William Barnes died of heart disease early this morning, and the boy is his sole heir. He must be kept as long as possible in utter ignorance of his uncle's death. You must help him to spend money; I will furnish what he needs and take his note for double the amount, and thus we will eventually absorb his entire inheritance. Last night I bought the note which is giving him so much trouble and therefore there can be no complications. You have only to do your part with your usual skill, and I will attend to the rest. Hurry."

He went over it carefully word by word, down to the end and then began again and read to the finish, and then the slip of paper dropped to the floor and he turned away his head and wept. Paul Dyke sat still with bowed head and hands tightly clasped together upon his knees, waiting for the storm of grief to subside and it was the saddest waiting of all his life. A dead cold pain came into his heart as he thought that a storm of reproach might come from the lips of George Langdon when the tempest of grief which was sweeping over his soul had spent its

force. Finally the silent weeping of Langdon changed to passionate sobs, and Paul Dyke arose and began to pace the floor, with one hand clasping his forehead and the other pressed just over his heart. The weeping of George Langdon recalled from the sad and shadowy past his dear lost Valentina, for those were the very echoes of her sobbing when grieved, in the long ago. The moments seemed to him as hours and every sob which came from the lips of his young friend brought a thrill of pain to his own heart and lessened his ability to preserve his composure; therefore he would not remain in the room—he would go out into the corridor and walk there where he could not hear the weeping voice of his boyhood friend and sweetheart. Hastily he approached the door, grasped and turned the knob which gave forth a sharp clicking sound, but the door did not open, for Langdon had locked it when they entered the room.

“Paul!” It was the grieved voice of Valentina. “Paul, do not go away, I cannot endure my sorrow alone,” and George Langdon arose from his chair and held out his hands appealingly.

“And you shall not be left alone, for I will help you to be strong and brave. I only thought to leave you for a little while. I was only going to walk in the corridor and strive to recover my composure, for your grief is mine also.” While they talked, Paul Dyke had returned to his seat by George Langdon’s

side, grasped his outstretched hands and gazed pityingly into his tearful eyes. "But tell me, truly," he continued, in a tremulous tone, "that you do not blame me for the part that I have acted in this dreadful affair, or at least that you will forgive me. I have wronged you my dear boy, only in having kept you in ignorance of the death of your uncle. In all else, I have been honest, frank and sincere with you, and as God is my judge and witness, my motives have been only those of an honest and faithful friend, and protector."

"I see—I see it all now!" replied Langdon, "and I do not blame you in the least Paul, not in the slightest degree. If you had told me of the death of my dear uncle I would have returned home immediately regardless of consequences, and would thus have placed myself wholly within the power of that scheming, dangerous man, Miserleigh, and would have gone straight to disgrace. I appreciate the wisdom of your course in the matter and implicitly believe in your honor and friendship, and therefore I have nothing to forgive. I have been vexed because you would not permit me to pay any of your expenses, in accordance with my arrangement with Miserleigh, but now I understand you in that matter also. You would not apply the lancet—God bless you! and thereby you have brought Sol. Miserleigh's wicked schemes concerning me to naught."

"How straight you go to the bottom of my designs in this affair," replied Paul, "and you generously relieved me of a very painful and difficult explanation, because I could not say to you concerning myself what you have discovered by a very simple process of reasoning. And now my dear boy, how do you propose to act?"

"I am willing to trust you implicitly Paul, and yield myself wholly to your guidance," replied Langdon earnestly.

"I accept the responsibility, George," said Paul, "but I must have time to think. Let us retire for we are both weary. Good night."

"Good night Paul," responded Langdon, "do not worry—all will come out right in the end. There is a God and He is good and just." And so they parted for the night.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A STILL HUNT WHICH FAILED.

Savages, in all parts of the world, select the few charmed moments of early day dawn when all of human life are deaf, dumb and still in restful slumber, as the most favorable time for an attack upon their enemies; and remembering this fact, and in imitation of the savage custom, the Chief of Police had selected that hour of the morning for his raid upon Sol. Miserleigh's old warehouse. He had not deemed it necessary to place a watch upon the premises because of the storm which had threatened all the afternoon and violently burst forth in the early evening and continued in a steady pour of rain all night. The storm, he reasoned, would drive the birds to cover during the night and the entire covey could in the early morning be easily snared by a single cast of the net. Therefore at the proper time, just as the gray light of dawn began to appear in the east, a covered patrol wagon containing a dozen stalwart and heavily armed police officers in charge of a captain, left the Central Station and was driven rapidly along the street toward the river through

a perfect deluge of rain. Ten minutes later the patrol wagon dashed into the alley and stopped in rear of Sol. Miserleigh's old warehouse, and by a few well directed blows with an ax, an opening was made in the fence through which the officers gained entrance to the yard and in a body, with weapons ready for instant use, boldly advanced to the attack. Greatly to their surprise, they found the basement door slightly ajar and pushing it open they entered.

"Gone!" said the captain as he paused in the middle of the floor and flashed his bull's-eye lantern around the room. "Gone!" he repeated dolefully and assumed a listening attitude. Only the steady pour of rain on the metal roof broke the profound stillness. "But search the house," he added as he sat down in a chair by the table and as the men hastened to obey his orders he drew a cigar from the inside pocket of his coat, placed it in his mouth and felt in his vest pocket for a match which he did not find. Glancing toward the grate, he observed a spark of fire amid the ashes and a piece of folded paper upon the dead embers, and stepping over to the grate he picked up the piece of paper and was upon the point of converting it into a lighter for his cigar, when observing writing on it he straightened it out, went over to the table, sat down in the chair and in the light of his bulls-eye lantern read the following:

"5:30 p. m.—To M. and B.—The cops are on to

us, the jig is up and at 7 o'clock we will be fifty miles from the city and will not return. Get away from here the moment you read this, or you will be gobbled up and run in. The whole scheme has been discovered by the slopping over of a fool's mouth."

"It is a case of skip" he said reflectively as he folded up the paper and put it in the inside pocket of his coat. "The birds have flown, and I, like a greenhorn on a false snipe hunt, am left to hold the empty sack; the only difference being the fact that the birds were actually here, but by resorting to barbarian methods of capture I suffered them to escape. Stupidity, thy name is Burns! This note is the warning of the gang to Blum and Miserleigh, who evidently came here during the night, found the note upon the table here, cast it upon the grate and hurried away. Contrary to their expectations it did not burn because the draft of the chimney sucked it away from the fire. But we'll get the head devils, Miserliegh and Blum, for doubtless they are now at their homes sound asleep. It is a dark morning and, thanks to the storm, they will be in no hurry to get away because they do not imagine that we have uncovered the whole plot."

At that the officers returned from their search and reported the house deserted. "Well, let us go," replied the captain and they passed out, closed the door, got into the wagon and were driven direct to the residence of Jacob Blum.

CHAPTER XLIV.

COMPLEX PROBLEMS.

In response to a heavy knock upon the door by the chief, Hunchback Mose appeared, and without a word of inquiry or explanation the officers pushed him aside and entered the house. Passing along the dark and narrow hallway, they came to the door of the sleeping apartment of Jacob and Leah, which, without knocking they opened and entered. The room was dark; its one small window which looked out into a narrow alleyway, with a tall brick building on the opposite side, gave within the room only a glimmering twilight even in bright clear weather, at midday, and on this dark and stormy morning it ushered into the partment but a faint glow of light.

Just within the doorway the officers paused, being unable to advance by reason of the darkness, and the captain drew the slide from the front of his bulls-eye lantern and flashed its brilliant light around the room. It contained three chairs, a round top table and a bed, on which, propped to a half sitting posture, was the gaunt withered form of a woman with long snow white hair, unloosed and brushed

back from a high bald forehead, on which great beads of perspiration gathered in quick succession and trickled down her face. Her large brown eyes were wide open and bore the peculiar expression of those of a soul in the throes of mortal dissolution, and bordering upon that condition of unconsciousness which immediately precedes the last grasp for the breath of life. As the brilliant light of the lantern flashed upon her face, it roused her from the dreadful stupor into which she had fallen an hour before, and with a sudden convulsive movement she clasped her thin hands together, raised herself to an upright sitting posture, peered around wildly into the darkness and moaned in a faint tremulous voice:

"Oh, Yacob, Yacob, vy did you go away, ven I vas so sick! so sick! so sick? Oh, Yacob, mine husband, we live together tirty year, und I vas always good to you und love you, und now ven I grows blind und cold you goes away und leave me to die all alone. Oh, Yacob, Yacob, vere vas you now? Don't you know dat your Leah vas dying—dying? Oh, Yacob, Yacob, come back, come back! Oh—ah!" The terrible death-rattle in her throat cut short her words, and with a convulsive shudder she sank backward upon her pillow—dead.

Martha, who when the officers entered the room was sitting in a chair by the bedside, arose as Leah began to moan and talk and endeavored to sooth her with kind words and caresses. Old Leah had

always been gentle and kind to Martha and she in turn loved the poor, suffering old woman, and for years had nursed her with gentle care and anxious solicitude, and now in her last moments, with gentle pathetic words she endeavored to deaden the pangs of death. When all was over, and the last breath had left the frail body of old Leah, Martha gently kissed the cold face, folded the pulseless hands across the still bosom, closed the dead eyes, and then sank down in the chair by the bedside and wept.

"Come!" said the captain to his men, and in silence they withdrew from the chamber of death, leaving Martha alone in the darkness. In the hallway the captain detailed an officer to watch the premises, and at the outer door he encountered Hunchback Mose, of whom he inquired gruffly:

"Are you Blum's brother?"

"Yaw," replied Mose quiveringly.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. He vent away mit Sol. Miserleigh about dark last night und he don't come back any more."

"With Sol. Miserleigh!" echoed the captain—"ah!" and without further speech he joined his men in the patrol wagon which was driven rapidly away. Ten minutes later they turned into a business street and went dashing at full speed by the office of Sol. Miserleigh, where the captain, as he looked from the rear window of the patrol wagon, beheld a most

comical scene. In the wide open doorway sat Mr. Grubb in Miserleigh's leather cushioned office chair which he had wheeled into that position. His feet were placed high up on the door casing and he had rocked back to a half reclining posture. His hat was tilted over on the left side of his head almost covering his ear. In his mouth was a huge cigar, four inches in length freshly lighted and from his lips issued a stream of white smoke which circled above his head and floated away in dense whirling clouds. As the patrol wagon went dashing by, Mr. Grubb merely raised his head from its comfortable rest on the back of the chair, lifted his hat with his left hand, bowed twice with a comical air of self-confidence and satisfaction, and finally, by way of a parting salute, swung aloft a pair of bright steel handcuffs which he held in his right hand.

"Go it, old boys, dash around in the rain and mud after the imps, but I'll capture the head devil here in his den!" ejaculated Mr. Grubb with a broad grin and a succession of chuckling sounds as he settled back into his former comfortable position.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN EARLY MORNING VISIT.

It then lacked a quarter of seven o'clock, and at seven precisely the patrol wagon drew up in front of the Miserleigh residence where the officers alighted and surrounded the building. The captain went direct to the front door and rang the bell violently but there was no response. Again and again he rang with the same result and finally he went around to the rear, where he found the kitchen door unlocked, and the old negro man servant in the act of kindling a fire in the range. The sudden appearance of the police officers struck terror to the soul of old Pompey, who immediately began to quiver and chatter like an ensnared ape in his native wilds, and was utterly unable to answer a single question intelligently, and hence, they left him groveling in a corner of the room, vehemently protesting his innocence of any misdemeanor, and tried the dining room door. It was unlocked and they pushed it open and entered the room.

"A leaking gas pipe!" said the captain, as he went to the window and raised the sash to let in fresh

air. In the hall the odor of gas was stifling and they opened the front door wide. A careful search of every room and closet in the main portion of the mansion failed to discover the presence of any person and finally they came to the apartment of Aurelia in the tower. The door was unlocked and they pushed it open and entered the room. Quickly they raised the windows and turned the thumb screws of the burners so as to stop the flow of gas into the room, and then the captain advanced and placed his hand upon Mrs. Miserleigh's face. "Dead!" said he in a hushed voice, and then he touched the hand of Aurelia. "Dead!" he repeated, "stone dead poor soul! A deliberate suicide and a cruel murder. Merciful God! What an unpardonable sin for a human soul to burden itself with in its last moments on earth!"

An officer, who had been detailed to search the dining room and its closets, entered the room at that moment. "Here, Captain," he said holding out a letter, "I found this on the table in the dining room."

The captain took the letter from the officer's hand and read aloud the superscription: "To whom it may concern." Turning it over in his hand he contemplated it a few moments thoughtfully and finally said: "This will doubtless explain this mystery; let us see." With that he broke the seal, drew forth the letter from its envelope and read the following:

"To the police officer or coroner,
or whoever may find this:

"I Celestine Miserleigh, being of sound mind and in perfect bodily health, and being about to pass to another stage of existence, concerning which I know nothing and care not, because it cannot be more wretched than the life which I have lived on earth—am directly and wholly responsible for my own death and also for the death of my daughter, Aurelia.

"Years ago, a Barnes was found dead over by Creve Coeur Lake. He wronged me when I was a mere child, and when I became a woman I took away his life. His son secretly married my daughter Aurelia, but I kept them apart because I hated the accursed name of Barnes and I turned his children adrift upon the street—and eventually I took his life also. This completed my earthly mission, and now I am ready to try another world.

"Sol. is not worth searching for, because he was merely a helpless instrument in my hands for the accomplishment of my revenge. He is only an accursed Barnes—let him go! Tonight I drove him forth into the storm and he will never return.

"Celestine Miserleigh."

"Come," said the captain to his men, "let us go. Surely we have had horrors enough for one day," and in silence they departed, leaving a watch over the dead and guards at the front and rear doors of the mansion.

CHAPTER XLVI.

JOSHUA HUMBLE'S PROPHECY.

At eight o'clock on that eventful morning, Joshua Humble entered the office of Sol. Miserleigh where he found Mr. Grubb, transformed into quite a respectable looking individual, seated in Miserleigh's office chair and smoking a very large and fragrant cigar, with evident relish and satisfaction.

"Ah, good morning, Mr. Humble!" said Grubb lowering his feet from their lofty perch on the door casing and creeping upward in his chair until his body assumed an upright position. "Glad to greet you this morning, Mr. Humble, although I would much prefer to welcome the individual for whose adornment these are intended," he added with a comical wink and nod displaying the handcuffs.

"He is late this morning" said Mr. Humble thoughtfully.

"Yes," responded Grubb, "bad weather, but he'll turn up presently and then I'll turn him down—to the police station! Eh?"

"You'll catch him first?"

"To be sure—ah! pray excuse me, there's a

letter from him on your desk over there, perhaps that will explain his tardiness this morning."

Mr. Humble walked over to his desk and took the letter in his hand. It was a large official envelope and addressed in Miserleigh's round bold handwriting:

"To Hon. Joshua Humble."

"Honorable!" repeated Mr. Humble with emphasis. "He's insolently facetious and grossly insincere. I'm weary of his sickening fawning and flattery. But let us see what it contains."

"Ah, yes, that is important!" replied Mr. Grubb, anxiously as he walked over to Mr. Humble's side.

Joshua Humble leisurely took a pair of scissors from his vest pocket, clipped off the end of the envelope, drew forth its enclosures which consisted of a legal document and a sheet of paper on which was written the following, which Mr. Humble read aloud: "Honorable Joshua Humble.

"In view of the fact that I can no longer remain in this city, and must immediately and speedily go elsewhere, never to return, I hereby restore to you as completely as it is possible for me to do in the limited time at my disposal, the value equivalent of the property which you transferred to me twenty-five years ago, in order to save your son from ruin, and your own honorable name from disgrace. After reimbursing yourself from the proceeds of my estate, I desire that the residue shall be transferred by you to my mother and sister.

"If you will calmly and dispassionately consider

the fact that I am voluntarily restoring your own to you when you could never recover it by any other means, I think you will be willing to believe that I am not wholly lost to all sense of Justice; and if you will further consider the fact that I am unreservedly placing in your hands my entire estate, which is many times more valuable than the property which you conveyed to me, and trusting to you to take therefrom simply your own, I think you will also be willing to believe that I have unbounded confidence in your integrity and honor.

"I go hence, a homeless, friendless wanderer, with the brand of crime upon my brain and heart and its awful stain upon my soul. Whatever I have been and whatever I now am, may be truly regarded as the simple result of a careful course of training from early infancy, for one specific purpose, the accomplishment of which ended my mission as an instrument of vengeance

"Sol. Miserleigh."

"True and clear cut," observed Mr. Grubb laconically, as Joshua Humble laid down the letter and took up the legal document.

"Yes," replied Mr. Humble, it is at least clear and concise. Let us see what this is," and then as he unfolded the paper and glancing at the printed heading, he read slowly, aloud:

"General Power of Attorney."

"I must go," said Mr. Grubb, starting toward the door. I am tired of carrying these bracelets, (jingling the handcuffs in his overcoat pocket) "and I am anxious to transfer them to the wrists of the

gentleman for whom they are intended."

"You will never capture Sol. Miserleigh alive, Mr. Grubb," said Joshua Humble impressively, "but if you are determined to go in search of him, I admonish you to be extremely careful and discreet. In him you have no ordinary man to deal with, and if hard pressed he will turn and hunt his pursuers to the death."

"Eh?" queried Mr. Grubb derisively.

"Don't make light of my warning, Mr. Grubb," responded Joshua Humble reproachfully.

"By no means, Mr. Humble, only you underestimate my abilities. But I must go; every moment is precious now—Good-bye," and Mr. Grubb glided out of the door and hurried away.

A few moments later Judge Prye entered the office and greeted Mr. Humble warmly, but added quickly as a troubled expression came upon his face:

"But Sol. Miserleigh has escaped after all?"

"Yes, for the present he is beyond the reach of the law, but the justice of the Almighty will eventually overtake him," was the confident reply.

Judge Prye remained silent, looking down upon the floor, evidently waiting for Mr. Humble to continue his observations, but as he also relapsed into silence, after an awkward pause of a few moments, Judge Prye glanced upward into Joshua Humble's face and said in a hushed voice:

"And have you not heard of the dreadful discovery by the police at the Miserleigh residence this morning?"

"No;" replied Mr. Humble.

Judge Prye then related to him the experience of the captain and his men, from the time of their departure from the Central Station, until their return, and finally added: "And thus the Miserleigh estate is suddenly surrounded by very grave legal complications."

"But perhaps this may simplify matters," replied Mr. Humble as he produced Sol. Miserleigh's letter which Judge Prye perused with great surprise and interest, and then Mr. Humble unfolded the legal document and read aloud as follows:

"Know all Men by These Presents:

"That I, Sol. Miserleigh, of the City of St. Louis, in the State of Missouri, have made, constituted and appointed, and by these presents do make, constitute and appoint Joshua Humble, of the City of St. Louis, State of Missouri, my true and lawful Attorney in fact for me and in my name, place and stead, to bargain, sell and convey, any or all of the real or personal property of which I am possessed, and to devote the proceeds thereof to whatsoever purpose he may elect, and to conduct and control, continue or discontinue my present business as he may elect, and to collect my dues by legal or other processes, and pay my debts and sign my name in receipt and in obligation; and hereby giving and granting to my said Attorney full power and authority to do and perform all and every act and thing whatsoever re-

quisite and necessary to be done in the matters aforesaid as fully, to all intents and purposes as I might or could do if personally present at the doing thereof, with full power of substitution or revocation, hereby ratifying and confirming all that my said Attorney, or his substitute, may or shall lawfully do, or cause to be done by virtue hereof.

"In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal, this 17th day of November, 18—, at 10 o'clock p. m.

"Sol. Miserleigh.

Witnesses:

"L. Vincent De Baun. }
"Phil H. Ryan." }

Then followed a notary's certificate, with his seal of office affixed in proper form.

As Joshua Humble concluded the reading of the document and laid it down upon his desk, Judge Prye grasped him by the hand and earnestly congratulated him upon the marvelous events, which within the space of three days had restored him to liberty and affluence, and then they arose and went out upon the street, locked the office door and walked away arm in arm conversing together in low and earnest tones.

At three o'clock that afternoon, the Coroner held an inquest over the remains of Aurelia and her mother, and on the following day, all that remained on earth of those two unhappy beings was borne away in silence under a weeping sky, and lowered into graves, scarce a dozen yards from the last resting place of William Barnes and his father.

CHAPTER XLVII.

AFTERMATH OF A CONSPIRACY.

When Jacob Blum parted from Sol. Miserleigh at the street corner near the old warehouse on Poplar Street, he was trembling with excitement and apprehension, and, without noticing the direction, he walked rapidly two squares during which he was utterly unable to command his thoughts. His mind was in a state of chaos, and his heart throbbed so violently that it sounded in his ears like the beating of a bass drum close by his side. He walked in the middle of the street and could scarcely refrain from casting himself prone upon the ground whenever he heard the sound of human footsteps upon the brick pavement. The single idea uppermost in his mind was that he must escape observation, and the one purpose by which he was governed, was swift and immediate flight. Finally when the idea of direction came to his mind, he observed that he had walked two squares due west, and there under the awning of an unoccupied store building he paused, out of the light of the street lamp, and gazed outward and upward to the heavy masses of whirling

clouds drifting across the sky, and listened to the mournful sigh of the wind through the leafless branches of the trees along the pavement.

Removing his hat from his head, he ran his fingers like a comb through the heavy tangled mass of wiry hair, and then with the fingers of his left hand he beat a tattoo upon his low retreating forehead, while with his right hand he stroked his long coarse beard, frequently chucking his first under his chin and making his teeth snap together like the jaws of a steel trap suddenly released from the confinement of its spring. It was one of his peculiar habits when greatly perplexed.

Finally his resolution was formed, and he moved at a quick pace—almost a run—passing through the dark alleys and across vacant lots, until in the western suburbs he came to a broad highway leading in a southwesterly direction, along which he hurried in frantic haste.

Finally he ascended a high rocky ridge, and when he reached the summit he turned and looked backward. In the distance the thousands of lights of the city gleamed and scintillated in the darkness, like jack-o-lanterns floating over a vast swamp, and he covered his face with his hands and wept.

“Poor Leah!” he moaned between convulsive sobs, “poor old vife, perhaps you vas dying now. Oh, voe, voe! vat shall I do? O’ Gott vat shall I do?”

His appeal to Deity was quickly answered; at that moment the roar of the advancing storm attracted his attention and immediately there came a deafening peal of thunder and a blinding flash, and he knew no more. Lightning had struck the tall tree under which he was standing, shivering its boughs, plowing a deep furrow down its trunk and expending its force in the ground beneath his feet.

A market gardener going to the city with a wagon load of vegetables in the early morning, found him there, prone upon the ground—dead, and reported the fact to a mounted police officer whom he met soon afterward. At eight o'clock the body of Jacob Blum was placed upon a marble slab in the city morgue, but it was nearly noon before it was positively identified by a police officer whose beat included that quarter of the city where the deceased had lived for fifteen years. After the Coroner's inquest the remains were prepared for burial by an undertaker and conveyed to the Blum residence. In accordance with previous arrangement the casket containing the remains of old Leah was placed in the hearse beside those of her husband, and in the dull twilight of a stormy evening they were borne away to the cemetery and lowered into graves, by strange rude men, who piled the cold wet earth above them and left them there to sleep until the coming of the Lord.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CHANGE IN A HUMAN LIFE.

When Martha and Mose returned to their home from the burial of Jacob and Leah, they found Judge Prye and Joshua Humble awaiting them there. In a very courteous and pleasant manner Mr. Humble introduced himself and Judge Prye to Martha, and then briefly explained the object of their visit. In a few well chosen words Mr. Humble gave Martha an outline of her early history and then kindly invited her to his home. "I will be a father to you, dear child," he said, "and my good sister will be a mother to you in affection. Come and join our family circle and be one of us." And so, amid tears of mingled joy and grief and many kind words of parting to Hunchback Mose, who stood alone on the doorstep of his silent and desolate home, Martha was escorted to the carriage in waiting for that purpose and conveyed to the home of Joshua Humble, where she was warmly welcomed by its kind and generous mistress.

Little Alice was especially delighted with the prospect of having a young, beautiful and sympa-

thetic companion and went immediately to Martha, climbed upon her lap and said:

"Auntie says that the Blum people called you Martha, but that your sure enough name is Valentina, because you were born on St. Valentine's day. And so I will always call you Valentina—Sister Valentina, because you have no real sister, you know;" and then she began relating fairy stories and in many charming ways endeavored to render herself agreeable and amusing.

And so the evening passed pleasantly away, and the following day was spent by the two ladies and little Alice in shopping, during which a good supply of wearing apparel was purchased for Valentina. In her childish anxiety to see how her new friend would look in the new dress which the child had been permitted to select, little Alice could scarcely wait for Valentina to remove her wraps, on their return home about six o'clock in the evening, and while the good mistress was superintending the preparation of the evening meal, Valentina to please the child, put on the favorite dress, put up her hair in the latest style and in many other respects added to her beauty and personal attractiveness.

"Oh, Sister, how beautiful you are now!" exclaimed Alice after Valentina had completed her toilet. "Come, let us go down to the sitting room and hear what Grandpa and Auntie will say;" and so, hand in hand, they went down the stairs, gently

opened the door of the sitting room and noiselessly entered.

Joshua Humble, who sat by the fire reading the evening newspaper, glanced toward the door as it swung open, and as Valentina appeared he took the spectacles from his eyes, arose to his feet, and bowed courteously. For an instant he did not recognize the very stylish and handsome young lady before him, but the joyous, rippling laugh of little Alice quickly enabled him to fathom the mystery, and advancing with an amused smile upon his face, he placed his hand upon Valentina's head and said to her in a soft gentle tone:

"Ah, that is right, daughter, that is as it should be! You are an heiress and the daughter of a noble man and a pure good woman. If you remain as good and pure as you are beautiful, which I doubt not, your life will be but a succession of joys."

He would have said more, but at that moment the servant announced supper and they repaired to the dining room where the mistress warmly complimented Valentina on her improved appearance, and then they sat down to the evening meal. The conversation at the table was very pleasant and entertaining, especially that of little Alice, who on this occasion, given full liberty of speech, embraced the opportunity to relate very charmingly a new fairy story which her grandpa had not heard, and then,

as usual, drew a moral of her own conception, which greatly excited the mirth of her listeners.

“Why, she is a bright little sunbeam!” said Valentina, patting her affectionately upon the head.

“She is the light of our home,” replied Joshua Humble earnestly.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A JOYOUS REUNION.

At that instant the front door bell rang and the servant was hastening to answer the summons, but Mr. Humble recalled her, saying: "Never mind, Katie, I will go," and rising from the table he passed out into the hall closing the door behind him.

When the door bell rang, Valentina paused and listened, and then as Mr. Humble arose from the table she laid down her knife and fork, and leaned back in her chair in an attitude of wrapt attention.

A strange sensation came to her heart, a feeling of blissful expectancy—a joyous thrill which she could not—did not try to understand—only she knew that the sweet spirit of an old love had taken possession of her soul, and in breathless silence she waited for the joyous consummation of a hope without form or substance.

Voices echoed in the hall—the voice of Joshua Humble in kindly greeting and other voices in joyous response, but Valentina heard but one voice, and it sent the warm blood coursing through her veins with lightning speed. Slowly she arose to her feet

and mechanically she moved toward the sitting room door, with the peculiar gliding motion of one walking in sleep. The door had been left open, and in the doorway she paused trembling with excitement, her face white as marble, her eyes beaming with a strange soft light. Her attitude was that of eloquent, pathetic appeal for recognition, and it was not long delayed. A moment and Joshua Humble, accompanied by George Langdon and Paul Dyke, entered the room.

"Paul!"

He glanced up and beheld Valentina standing in the doorway.

"Paul!"

And she held out both hands toward him and moved slowly forward, her head thrown backward in a beautiful pose, and her face radiant with joy.

"Valentina! in God's name are you in the flesh, or only in spirit?" was all he could say as he shaded his face with his hand.

In the flesh! dear Paul, in the flesh, thank God!" she answered joyfully as she reached his side and grasped his outstretched hands.

It was a joyful meeting and Joshua Humble modestly turned away his head and George Barnes instantly discovered something very interesting in the fire, and a few moments later they both silently withdrew, leaving the lovers alone together in speechless happiness.

Half an hour afterwards, the meeting of brother and sister, though less demonstrative, was not less joyful. Twenty years before they had drifted away from each other upon the street and even that fact had long since vanished from their minds.

Little Alice seemed very favorably impressed with George Barnes. In the excitement of the meeting of brother and sister, of lover and sweetheart, after many years of separation, the little lady had been quite forgotten, and there she stood, close by George Barnes' side, casting sly and timid glances up into his face and nervously twining her nimble fingers together. Her eyes were very bright and expressive; a delicate rose-tinted spot had come upon either cheek and her lips were slightly parted, betraying the intense preoccupation of her mind. Finally, her earnest scrutiny of his countenance attracted his attention, and putting out his hands towards her he said:

"This I presume is Miss Alice, is it not?"

"Yes," she replied in a half whisper, and in a confidential tone, "I am Alice Snow, grandpa's only daughter. And you are George Barnes, Valentina's only brother. I thought you would never see me—I stood here so long looking up into your face, and you looked another way all the time."

"Ah, I did not intend to slight you, little lady," he said as he lifted her to his lap and added with a smile, "how old are you, dear?"

"Eight years," she replied, archly, glancing up into his face. But Grandpa says I will soon be a young lady, and Auntie says not very soon, and so I can't find out just when I will be grown, but it doesn't matter now, I suppose, for I will know when that time comes."

"Doubtless you will," he replied laughingly.

"Do you know I dreamed of you last night? Funny, isn't it? And I thought I lived with Grandpa and Auntie in a very large and beautiful house, and I was a young lady and wore a long dress of pale blue silk, and I wore a diamond necklace and had beautiful diamond rings on my fingers and in my ears, and my skin was white and soft as velvet, and my hair was the color of gold and dressed something in style of Valentina's now. And my eyes were very blue and clear and my lips were soft and red."

"A very true likeness of what you will be ten years hence," said George admiringly.

"Perhaps so. Well (as I say in my fairy stories), in my dream last night, you came to me in the parlor of my beautiful home and said that a good fairy had told you to come and ask me to love you. You said that you wanted to be with me all the time and that you wouldn't try to live without me any longer, and there was no fun for either of us in living alone. Well, I don't know what I said—in fact I don't believe I said anything, but just looked down upon the

floor and blushed and smiled and my heart went pit-a-pat! and then you kissed me, and I awoke to find it only a dream."

When she had finished, the face of George Barnes was scarlet and he bowed his head and kissed her on the lips. She sat still a moment looking up into his face wonderingly, her large blue eyes wide open and her lips slightly parted, and then with a sudden and graceful movement she put her arms around his neck, and as a charming flush came upon her face, she kissed him twice upon the lips—soft dainty kisses, and then she crept down from his lap, and tripped lightly away in search of her auntie who at that moment was occupied with her domestic duties in another part of the house.

Joshua Humble had been an attentive observer of the interesting scene between George Barnes and little Alice, and when she had gone, George turned to him and inquired in a tremulous tone;

"Is she an angel or a child?"

"Only an angelic child," replied Mr. Humble, softly.

CHAPTER L.

OCCURRENCES OF AN EVENTFUL YEAR.

A year had passed, during which Paul Dyke had taken to wife his boyhood sweetheart, Valentina Barnes. It was a natural sequence and provoked no comment. It was a simple matter of course, for they had been one in spirit in the days of their unhappy childhood when he was her unselfish friend and valiant protector, and so in the day of their prosperity their marriage was but the consummation of that which had been ordained from the beginning.

It was a pure and holy alliance, a genuine heart union, and to them the world seemed a thousand-fold more beautiful and life infinitely more precious. The Barnes estate had, under the excellent management of Judge Prye, passed safely through the perilous process of settlement, and had been equally divided between George and Valentina as the only heirs-at-law. By mutual consent the Barnes residence had fallen to Valentina, and so after the quiet wedding at the home of Joshua Humble on a beautiful morning in May, they went immediately to their home and there quietly began to live a new and beautiful life.

During the year also, Joshua Humble had re-occupied his old home after a thorough renovation and refurnishing, and the old mansion had been fully restored to its former elegance and comfort. After an earnest though friendly contest between little Alice and Valentina for the possession of the person of George, the former gained the victory, and so he had removed all of his personal belongings to the Humble residence and permanently became one of that happy family circle.

And also during the year Joshua Humble had, in accordance with his power of attorney from Sol. Miserleigh, converted the entire Miserleigh estate into cash, and taken from it his own, and then repurchased his former residence and office building from L. Vincent De Baum, to whom he had sold it to clear the title. The residue of the proceeds of the Miserleigh estate he had transferred to Valentina and George as the sole legal heirs of Aurelia and Mrs. Miserleigh, and thus it happened that in the end, the untied blood of Barnes and Miserleigh in the persons of brother and sister joined also the two estates, and love filled forever the place which hatred and vengeance had long usurped.

The old office building had, during the year, been thoroughly renovated and refurnished, and over the door a new sign had been placed, on which in large letters appeared the name of the new firm.

"Humble, Barnes & Dyke."

When all had been completed, and the new firm had been well started upon its career of prosperity and honor, Joshua Humble said to his partners, George Barnes and Paul Dyke:

"Now that we have removed the last relic of the sorrows and humiliations of the past, let us begin life anew, and with God's help and guidance may we be prosperous and happy."

On a beautiful May morning Mr. Humble found among the many letters upon his desk, one addressed to him in familiar handwriting, which bore a foreign stamp and postmark. Although his curiosity to know its contents was greatly excited, he did not open it, but sat gazing at it dreamily as he turned it over in his hands saying softly to himself:

"Ah! from Mr. Grubb—Phineas Starley—a queer comical genius, but a brave and brilliant man. Educated for the Christian ministry he turned detective, and has been far more successful in the capture of criminals than in the conversion of human souls."

At that juncture, Paul Dyke and George Barnes entered the office with their usual cheerful and respectful morning greeting, to which Mr. Humble responded in his usual happy voice and pleasant manner.

CHAPTER LI.

EXPERIENCES OF MR. GRUBB.

"I have a letter here," said Mr. Humble; "it is from Phineas Starley, and I will read it aloud, as it will doubtless be interesting to you as well as to myself." With that he broke the seal of the envelope, drew forth the enclosure, unfolded it, and read as follows:

"Republic of Mexico, State of Chihuahua.

Janos, September 8th, 18—.

Joshua Humble, Esq.:

My dear sir: When I parted from you in your office fourteen months ago, I firmly resolved not to communicate with anybody in St. Louis nor to return there until I could bring with me the slanderer, forger and murderer—Sol. Miserleigh. But I did not reckon on a long and perilous pursuit, and hence my long silence. However, now that the chase is ended, and realizing from experience the grave uncertainty of life in this wilderness, I have decided, for business reasons of great importance to you, to give you herewith a detailed account of my wanderings in search of Sol. Miserleigh:

Two months after my departure from St. Louis, I located him in the wilderness of the Ozark mountains, where he had taken refuge in a cabin with a trapper, whom I chanced to meet, and from whom, by adroit questioning, I obtained a complete description of his guest, but I failed to find the cabin until the following afternoon, and approached it across an open space a hundred yards in width. The cabin door stood wide open and a cheerful fire was blazing in the chimney, but there was no person within. I was about to enter when a peculiar sound attracted my attention, and glancing to the right I beheld Sol. Miserleigh in trappers costume standing beside a large tree. In his hands was a heavy repeating rifle which was leveled at my head and his finger was moving nervously toward the hair trigger.

"Good evening, Mr. Grubb," he said in a tone of mock courtesy. "Will you do me the favor, sir, to hold up your hands?"

His eyes gleamed wickedly; I saw that resistance would result in instant death to me, and up went my hands above my head, and, imitating his insolent tone of voice, I replied:

"Ah! good evening Mr. Miserleigh; happy to meet you sir!"

"Not under the present circumstances, I judge," he responded angrily. "I've a mind to send a bullet through your brain, but it would be a shame to kill a harmless silly cur. You imagine yourself a detec-

tive and have started out to capture a man. Abandon that foolish purpose, puppy, and go home and resume your business of Bible pounding and expounding, for which you were educated. As a religious crank you may be successful, while as a hunter of men you are a ridiculous failure. Now clasp your hands behind your back and turn your face to the left."

I complied instantly and in silence.

"Now, sir," resumed Miserleigh, "when I give the word, move straight forward until sunset. I will follow within rifle range, and if you turn to look backward I'll riddle your body with bullets! March!"

I obeyed his command and moved forward in a straight line. For an hour I could hear his measured, stealthy tread close in my rear and then it grew more and more distant and finally only my own footfall broke the profound stillness; but I did not dare to pause until twilight came and then I sat down upon a rock, free and beyond danger.

CHAPTER LII.

A SLEUTH ON A LONG COLD TRAIL.

That night I returned to the cabin and captured the harmless old trapper, but Sol. Miserleigh had fled. The next day about noon I struck his trail about ten miles west of the trapper's cabin, at a mineral prospector's camp where he had purchased a quantity of food, and for six months I followed him in that direction, through the Indian Territory and onward into Texas, where I finally lost his trail, in the bleak and treeless wilderness of the "Staked Plains." He traveled entirely on foot, and I was compelled to do the same. He avoided every human habitation, but could not wholly escape observation, and hence, from information obtained from cattlemen and hunters, I was enabled to follow him at a distance of from two to six days' travel. I could have obtained assistance, which was freely offered to me on many occasions, but I craved the satisfaction of capturing him alone and single-handed, for he had deeply wounded my pride and grievously insulted me, and I was possessed of an insane desire for revenge. For months I wandered over that trackless waste,

on foot and on horseback, often accompanied by cowboys in search of stray cattle, and finally I located him again on the bank of the Rio Grande river, thirty miles above Eagle Pass in a camp of cattle-skinners, a class of petty thieves, whom the cattlemen hunt to death. I was in company of a troop of cowboys who had followed the trail of the mauraders three days and nights, and one morning just at daydawn, we raided the camp and captured the entire gang, with the exception of Sol. Miserleigh and the leader, a gray sun-browned old villian who plunged into the river and escaped to the Mexican side. Even amid the excitement and confusion of the battle, Sol. Miserleigh recognized me, and when he reached a point of safety on the opposite shore, he shouted back defiance accompanied by frightful blasphemy and violent menacing gestures.

That night, regardless of the warnings of my brave companions, I swam the Rio Grande, and the following day on foot tracked the two fugitives to a hacienda twenty miles distant in Mexico. Fortunately, the owner of the hacienda, a handsome, princely old gentleman, was at home, and to him I frankly disclosed the object of my visit. He listened attentively and in grave silence, and when I had finished he responded slowly and with the peculiar Spanish accent, as he stroked his long white beard thoughtfully:

"Yours is a perilous venture my young friend,

very difficult indeed, and ten to one are the chances that you will lose your life if you persist in your endeavors to capture that bold bad man. Two hours ago your enemy and his evil companion went westward toward that mountain wilderness which you see in the distance. They went in great haste, evidently anticipating pursuit. You must not follow them alone, I will furnish you a guide—a man of courage and discretion, whose advice you must not fail to heed. But do not attempt to capture your man on Mexican soil, for that would be a gross violation of our laws. Follow him carefully, prudently, skillfully and eventually upon American soil you may accomplish your purpose. I bid you God speed.”

An hour afterwards, accompanied by my guide, I started westward on foot on the trail of the fugitives who were mounted on burros, which they had purchased at the hacienda. For six days we followed them without difficulty, along a plain highway, but on the morning of the seventh day, at a hacienda in a narrow mountain valley my guide suddenly refused to accompany me in any direction, and thus I was left alone in a strange land. Fearing treachery I appealed to the owner of the hacienda for protection, which was freely and generously granted, but he positively refused to furnish me a guide to enable me to advance, saying merely:

“It would be useless young man, utterly useless, and more than that it would be criminal, as it would

speedily result in the sacrifice of so many lives. The mountains westward are swarming with banditti and you would all be massacred before you had advanced ten miles. I will escort you safely to the American frontier but not one miles into the interior. Accept my affectionate hospitality as long as you may desire to remain upon my estate. I give you faithful protection."

CHAPTER LIII.

FUGITIVE AND SLEUTH IN A FOREIGN LAND.

On the following morning, while seated in the shade of the broad veranda of the mansion which faced westward toward the beetling cliffs, whose summits were lost in a heavy bank of pearly clouds, I remembered your parting words, Mr. Humble, namely:

“You will never capture Sol. Miserleigh alive; but if you are determined to go in search of him, I admonish you to be extremely careful and discreet. In him you have no ordinary man to deal with, and if hard pressed he will turn and hunt his pursuers to the death.”

All that day I revolved your words in my mind and resolved to continue the pursuit and to press him close until he should turn hunter, when I would retreat before him and lure him across the northern border upon American soil, where I would ambush and capture him either alive or dead. At the first favorable opportunity I would go forward on foot at night, to the next hacienda in the interior thirty miles distant, where I believed that Miserleigh and

his companion had taken refuge. I had ascertained that the hacienda was a station of a stage line running far into the interior and connecting with another line running north through the State of Chihuahua to the American frontier at Paso del Norte, and I conjectured that Sol. Miserleigh would endeavor to return to the United States by that route, with the purpose of hiding in the mountain fastness of New Mexico to engage in mining.

On the following night, about nine o'clock, after the murderous peons had all retired to their quarters, I bade adieu to my kind and generous host just outside the main entrance to the hacienda and walked away in the darkness. The following morning at daydawn I reached my destination and learned that the westbound stage had passed that point during the night, and that Sol. Miserleigh had taken passage in it leaving his companion at the hacienda to shift for himself. There I rested during that day and employed a servant, a man who could talk both Spanish and English fluently, and on the night following we took passage in the stage and followed in pursuit of Miserleigh. I found my servant a most competent and faithful man, and through him I easily gained all the information necessary to enable us to follow the fugitive. Finally, at a stage station within two days' journey of Paso del Norte, we learned that Miserleigh had left the stage at that point and gone westward on horseback, accompanied by a single man as

guide and servant. There, also, we alighted and accompanied by a trusty guide, we followed in pursuit of the fugitive, being only six hours in his rear. At a point, sixty miles west of the station where we had left the stage, we ascertained that Miserleigh was only about one hour in advance of us, and there I dismissed and sent back our guide and sent my servant forward to decoy Miserleigh in pursuit of me, while I turned north upon a broad highway leading across the American border fifteen miles distant. My servant, a shrewd and faithful man, easily accomplished his task, and two hours' later I had the extreme satisfaction of beholding Sol. Miserleigh and servant, accompanied by my servant, following me at a rapid pace about two miles distant. I gave my horse the rein and he cantered swiftly along, while Miserleigh, evidently greatly angered, crowded his horse to its utmost speed. However, my horse, being much the best and comparatively fresh, I easily maintained the distance between us, and just as the sun was sinking behind the mountains I crossed the line into New Mexico. At that point I reined in my horse and was revolving in my mind how I might ambush and capture my pursuer, when a voice in clear ringing tones called out from a dense thicket of thorn bushes on my left:

"Halt!"

Instantly I obeyed the command, and then in compliance with further orders, I rode over and dis-

mounted in the midst of a company of revenue officers of the United States, to whom I hastily explained my business and circumstances, and after a brief examination of my credentials the commander expressed his willingness to assist me in the capture of my pursuer.

Our place of concealment was on the west side of the road, and upon the east was a sheer precipice into a rocky gorge a hundred feet in depth. We had barely time to make good our concealment, when Sol. Miserleigh, bareheaded and covered with dust, his long gray hair in tangled masses floating back in the wind, his horse panting from exhaustion and white with foam, which dripped from its flanks and mouth, came dashing over the gentle hillock a hundred yards distant, and down the slope like a fiend incarnate upon a mission of terrible vengeance.

"Make ready!" commanded the chief, and nine glittering rifles were leveled upon the man and horse, who had reached a point directly opposite the ambuscade.

"Halt!" rang out the voice of the chief, and Sol. Miserleigh reined in his horse so powerfully that it reared into the air and went reeling backward upon its haunches. Even in that moment of confusion his quick glance had penetrated the thicket and estimated the number and character of his captors and discovered that I was one of them, and instantly there came upon his face an expression of scorn and

hate which I shall never forget. As the horse staggered into an upright position on its feet, Sol. Miserleigh straightened himself in the saddle and shaking his clenched hand toward me shouted defiantly:

"Trapped! Curse you, Phineas Grubb! Trapped, but not captured!"

"Throw up your hands Sol. Miserleigh!" I commanded, stepping out into the opening and leveling my rifle at his head. "You are now on American soil, and as an officer of the law and the bearer of a warrant for that purpose, I arrest you upon the charge of murder and command you to surrender!"

"Never!" he shouted as with a quick movement which I did not anticipate, he reined his horse to the opposite side of the road. "Never!" he repeated savagely as he plunged the sharp Spanish spurs upon his heels, deep into the quivering sides of his horse, which with a cry of pain and terror, sprang upward and forward and went crashing over the precipice upon the tree tops and rocks below.

At the bottom of the gorge we found him—dead, and horribly disfigured, and there upon the spot where he plunged to death, we dug a grave, wrapped him in his blanket and covered him up with earth and stones.

I am now enroute homeward, and stopping here for a few days' rest. I cannot say just when I will be able to reach St. Louis, but you may expect me at any time after you receive this.

Wishing you good health and the full enjoyment
of your old time prosperity, I remain Sir,

Yours very truly and faithfully,

Phineas Starley.

alias Grubb."

"An appropriate ending of a life of violence and
crime," said Joshua Humble sadly, as he folded the
letter, returned it to its envelope and calmly turned
to his morning duties.

CONCLUSION.

GLEANINGS FROM THE FIELD OF LIVES.

The passing of the old; the advent of the new; the balancing of accounts of human acts, the pure against the vile; the ravages of the canker of time upon all things of earth. These were the entries in the record of years as with swift and silent motion they floated by. And also "Father Time" had been busy swinging his keen blade with resistless sweep, reaping, and with careful hands separating the evil from the good and saving only the best for the garner of the Almighty.

And gleaners had followed the grim reaper, gathering the tares and burning them, until the field had been cleared of all that had been marked for the harvest; but here and there had been left to ripen, a few souls which the Master desired to preserve for future use in the economy of His human husbandry.

During the eleven years which had passed since the important events which immediately followed the flight of Sol. Miserleigh, Time had dealt kindly and gently with Joshua Humble and Judge Prye,

for, although many additional lines had come upon their faces, and their hair and beard had changed from mottled gray to pure white, in all other respects they were apparently unchanged.

The firm of Humble, Barnes and Dyke, Dealers in Financial Securities, under the wise and careful guidance of Mr. Humble, had advanced to a commanding position in the world of finance and gained in wealth and influence as the years came and departed.

Having accumulated a comfortable competence in the practice of law, Judge Prye had put aside all affairs of business and had given himself up wholly to the enjoyment of well-earned ease and comfort. He had traveled in foreign lands for nearly six years and, on his return to St. Louis he had become the guest of Mr. Humble, and the two genial old gentlemen were supremely happy in each others society.

As they sat before a glowing fire of coal in an open grate, in the smoking apartment of the Humble mansion, Judge Prye talked interestingly about his travels. He had journeyed through every civilized country of the Eastern hemisphere, even through far-off Siam, China, Japan, Turkey and India. In Egypt he had floated down the sluggish Nile along whose dream-enchanted shores are strewn the crumbling monuments of the greatness and power in the dim and distant past of a now conquered and dying country. He had stood in the shadows of the

lofty Pyramids and had even climbed upon the great head of the Sphynx and from thence beheld the enchanting wonders of the mirage of the great desert.

Germany, France, Greece, Spain, Italy and the British Isles he had visited and delved amid their ruins for mementoes of their ancient civilization, and he described what he had experienced and seen with the eloquence force and intelligence of a true scientist.

The sweet, sparkling wine which these two companionable old gentlemen sipped, and the choice fragrant cigars which they smoked while they talked, not only contributed to their comfort and increased their vivacity, but rendered them somewhat reminiscent in mind. Gradually, therefore, their conversation drifted from the subject of the journeying of Judge Prye to the many marvelous improvements, expansive and industrial development of St. Louis during his absence, until finally some casual remark recalled to memory the Miserleigh-Barnes affair of the long ago, and Mr. Humble's wonderful deliverance from bondage and poverty and his restoration to wealth, power and happiness.

"During my long absence from St. Louis," said Judge Prye, to Mr. Humble, as he again filled his glass with wine and lighted a fresh cigar, "I have often wondered what has become of the minor personages who figured in the infamous intrigue of which you were the victim, and I shall be much interested if you will tell me."

A very sad expression came upon the face of Mr. Humble as he replied slowly: "I dislike to recur to that gloomy subject, my good friend, especially on this occasion, our reunion after years of separation. I wish I could bury it in the graves of those who have gone hence, but I cannot do so—it will not down, but like Banquo's ghost it will rise and come forth to vex my soul with the remembrance of those years of darkness and woe. But I do not reproach you for making the inquiry," he added quickly, as he observed an expression of regret upon the face of his friend; "no, your desire for that information is entirely natural and right and I will give it to you as briefly as possible and then let us dismiss that subject forever."

"Hunchback Mose, who was the sole heir of Jacob Blum has continued his brother's business and amassed a comfortable competence. He has also become noted for his honesty and truthfulness, and for scrupulous promptness in the fulfillment of every obligation, and for his generosity, philanthropy and public spirit, and his excellent moral character."

"And Phineas Starley, (alias Grubb), having secured the reward of five thousand dollars offered for the capture of Sol. Miserleigh, alive or dead, has abandoned the detective business, altogether, and has become a lawyer of considerable ability and prominence."

"And old mother Hurt, and the fishwoman, and

the 'Three Graces of Satan' have gone the way of all the earth, the former having died of old age, and the others of beastly dissipation. As for 'Amos the Fox,' Lafe Steele and 'Hairlip Brown,' they have never been heard of since the day of their flight from their quarters in the basement of Sol. Miserleigh's old warehouse, and their fate may only be conjectured as that of all people of their class whom the Lord is sure to overtake and overwhelm in due time."

"And the kind and faithful old soul, Mrs. O'Keefe, has passed beyond the realm of mortal pain and sorrow, to the inheritance of 'the just made perfect,' leaving forever upon the minds and hearts of her children the impress of her wise precepts and pure example."

With that brief statement, the subject was dismissed abruptly and the conversation drifted to other and more agreeable matters and it was long past midnight before they became aware of the lateness of the hour and reluctantly parted for the night.

And now, it becomes necessary for the author to acquaint the reader with what Mr. Humble did not tell to Judge Prye, because of this bit of personal history of which he had been informed during his journeyings, by correspondence with Mr. Humble, namely:

Claude Humble had returned to his old home and engaged in a profitable business, and was a constant source of pride to his father.

And Paul Dyke and his beautiful and loving wife, Valentina, had in their luxurious home experienced but a succession of joys, for to them each day had brought new happiness, and each year had but multiplied and strengthened the ties which bound them together in common interest, sympathy and affection.

And during these eleven years, the Lord had blessed them with three beautiful children, and within the old Barnes mansion, all day long were sounds of childish glee, and when the loving husband and father returned to his home at night, three pairs of little feet went tripping joyfully to meet him at the gate, and three pairs of white dimpled little hands were clasped about his knees, and three pairs of sweet childish lips were pouted for the loving kisses which he always gave them. And a calm, sweet-faced woman stood just within the twilight of the doorway, waiting, silently, modestly in deep and thrilling emotion, to welcome him home—not with empty words and profuse manifestations of affection, but with the silent eloquent language of the human soul, which may be read only in the eyes—waiting for the kisses which on each occasion were as new and sweet and wonderful as the kisses of their betrothal eleven years before.

And those eleven years had wrought great changes in the persons and characters of little Alice and George Barnes, the former “little” Alice no longer, but the fair and accomplished Miss Alice

Snow, granddaughter of the wealthy stock-broker, Joshua Humble. As for George Barnes, he had changed from a mere beardless boy to a man of magnificent mental endowments and physical development—an exact likeness and image of his noble father, and under Joshua Humble's careful training he had acquired a business knowledge and experience and a confident self-reliance which enabled him to meet successfully the requirements of every emergency.

And so, in the full tide of perfect manhood and womanhood, George and Alice were married, and their wedding at the Humble mansion was one of the grandest events of the kind that had ever transpired in the city. All of the old friends were present on that interesting occasion, including Hunchback Mose, Lawyer Starley, (alias Grubb), and the marriage ceremony was beautiful and impressive, and the wedding feast was sumptuous, and the presents numerous and elegant. But the gift which attracted the most attention of all, was one to the groom from Joshua Humble, an American clock in a frame of solid wrought gold, two feet in height, inclosed in an oval case of plate glass on which was traced in inlaid letters of gold the following quaint old stanza:

“Here my master bids me stand,

And mark the time with faithful hand.

What is his will, is my delight—

To serve him well by day and night.

Master, be wise and learn of me,
To serve thy God, as I serve thee."

The present of Joshua Humble to the bride was contained in a letter addressed to her, which read as follows:

"Light of our home—Treasure of our hearts! All we have is thine; but that you may not be wholly dependent on your husband, I give you herein my bank order for fifty thousand dollars, to supply your individual wants until the Master calls me hence. —
Grandpa."

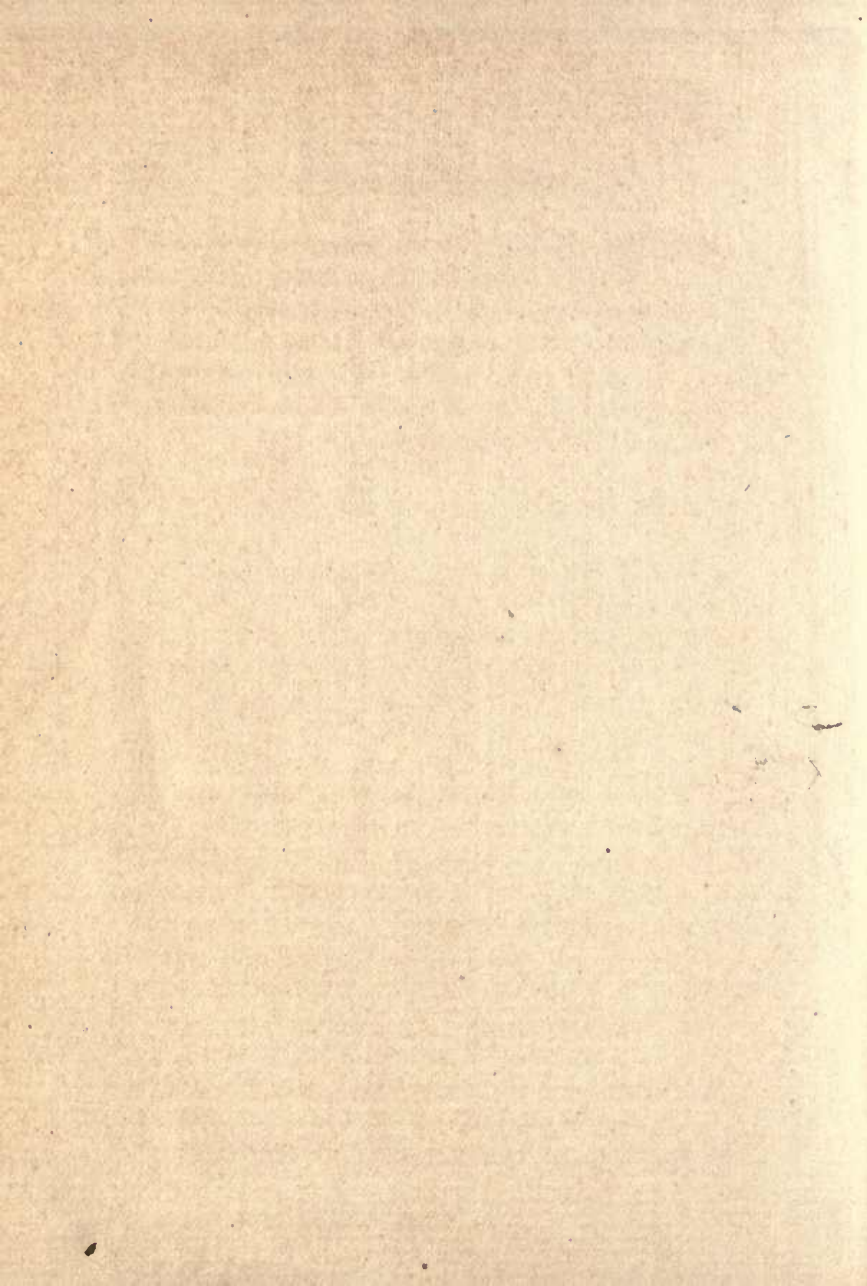
And thus the dream of little Alice was literally fulfilled, and thus the cup of Joshua Humble's happiness was filled to the brim. Years have passed since then, but Joshua Humble, with eyes undimmed and mind unclouded, still lives and performs his daily duties with the same care and skill as in his early life. And in his home may be heard the prattle of children—the children of George and Alice, and the low, sweet lullaby of the fair young mother crooning her baby on her bosom. And at the window are beautiful baby faces peering out into the gathering twilight—watching for the first glimpse of papa and grandpa returning home from the business of the day.

And Joshua Humble's good sister, Almira, still lives, but she has grown feeble and childish, and sits all day by the fire, knitting—knitting—knitting, and looking steadily down into the glowing embers; thinking—thinking of the past. Her noble brother

is her favorite theme of conversation, and these are always her concluding words:

"The good Lord has lengthened the days of Joshua Humble, far beyond the limit of human life, in compensation for the long years of his woe and humiliation as the slave of Sol. Miserleigh."

THE END.



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